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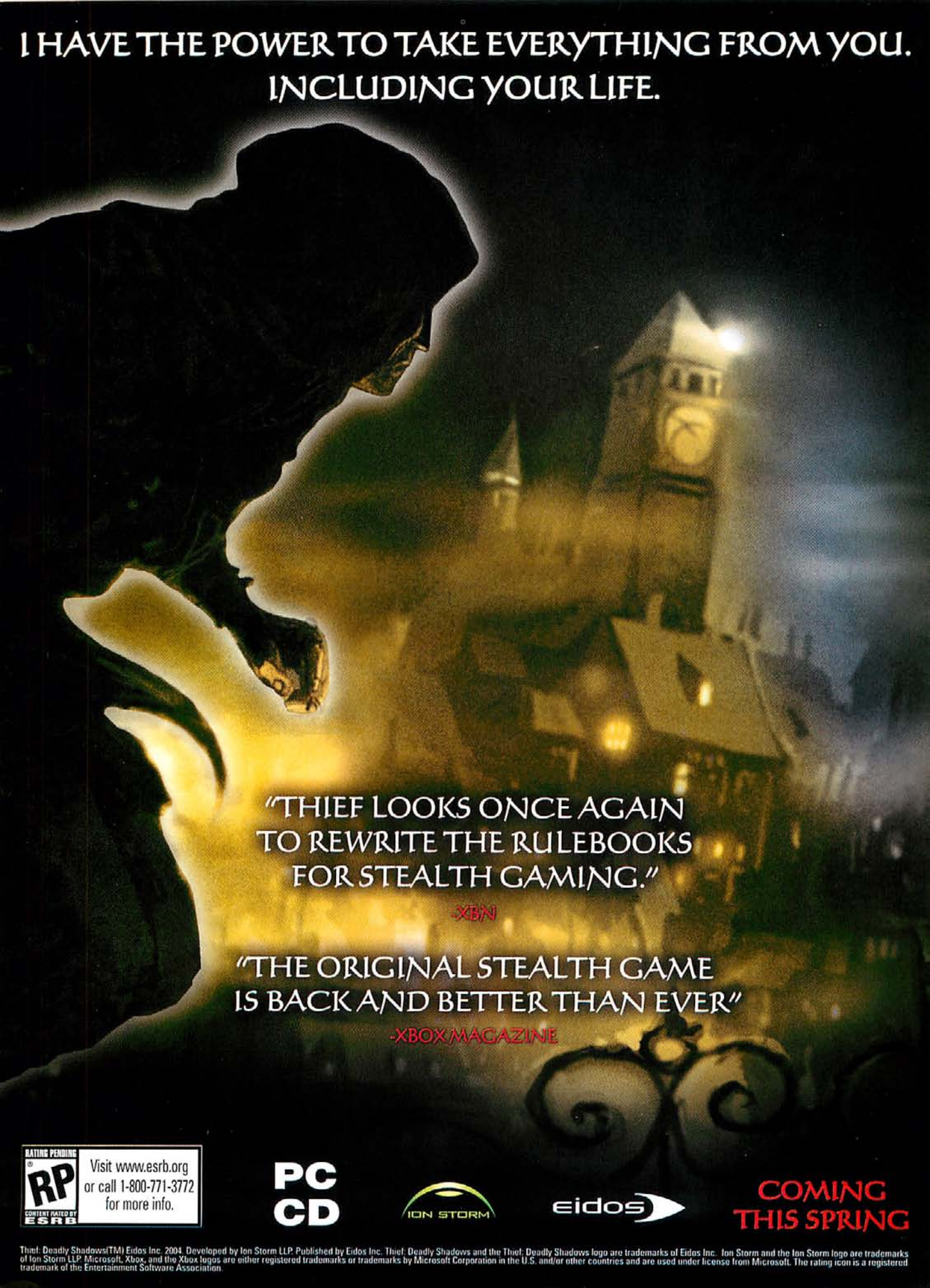
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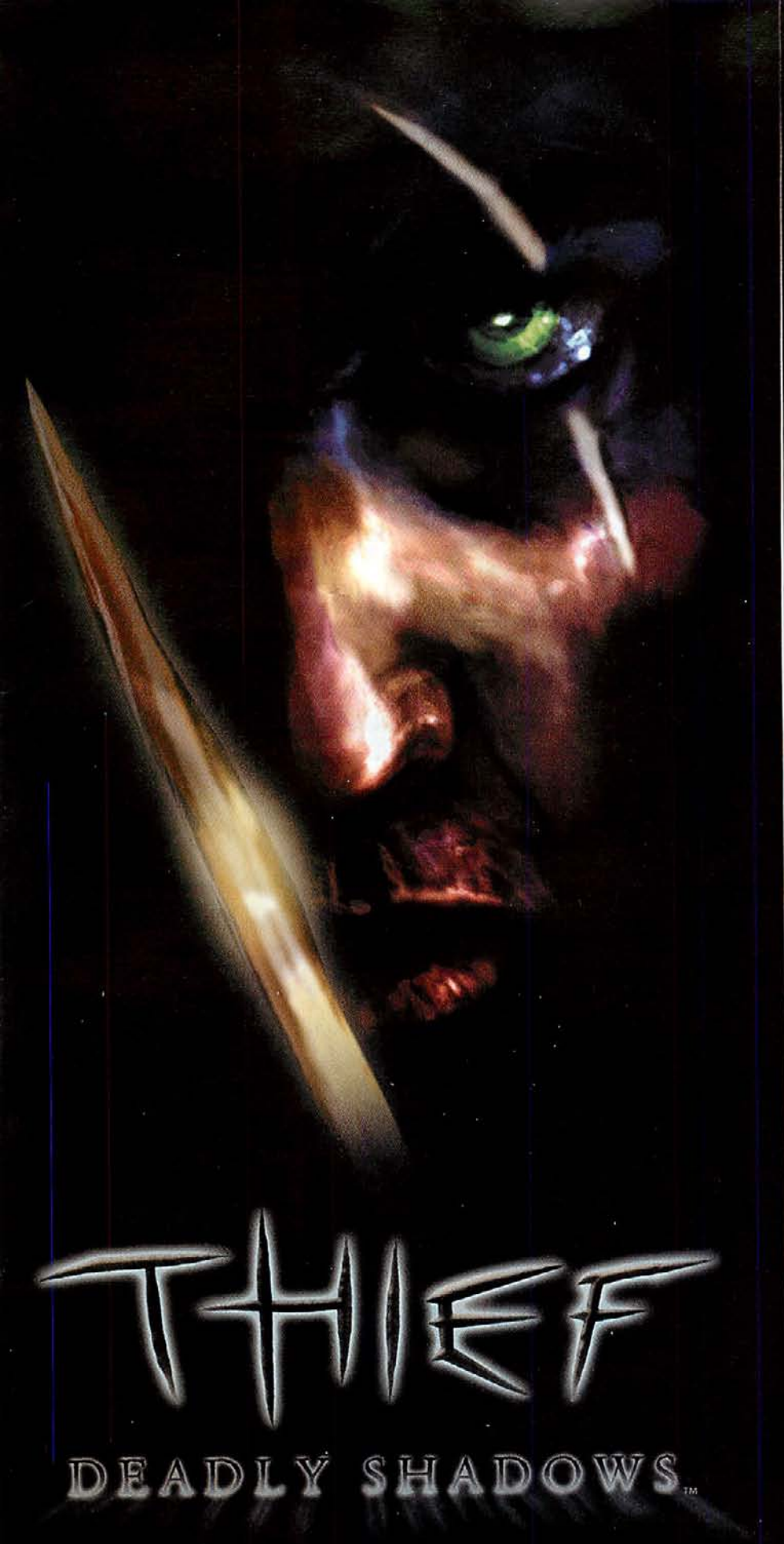
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46 Previews
"Too many previews, not enough room!" That was a major problem this month for the *CGW* gang. Still we managed to swing some sweet scoops and tasty bits of info on some upcoming games such as **Tribes: Vengeance** and **Leisure Suit Larry**. And let's not forget an exclusive look at **S.T.A.L.K.E.R.**—we actually had a chance to see this hot game in action.



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COVER STORY

The Sith Strike Back!

The sequel to the 2003 game of the year is here! Get the world's first look at **Knights of the Old Republic: The Sith Lords**.

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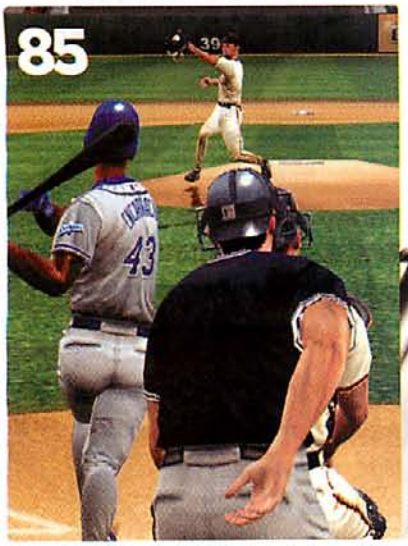
Overrated/Underrated

Opinions are like, well, you know, and we've got a lot of 'em—both opinions and (on our staff) the things they're like. The *CGW* Think Tank makes the tough calls on the overhyped and unrecognized in gaming.

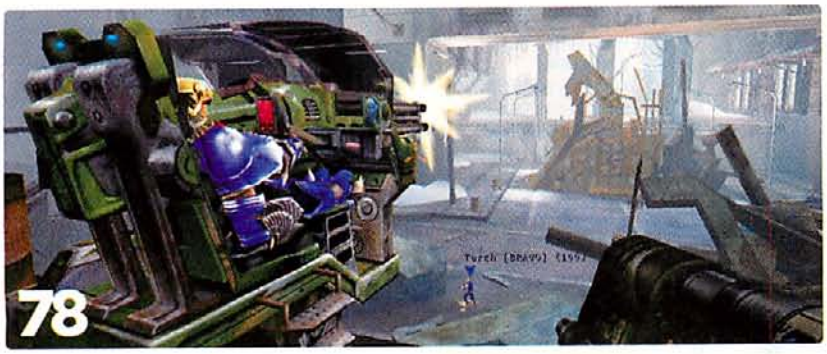
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ILLUSTRATION BY TAVIS COBURN. PHOTOGRAPH BY ARNOLD TIOSEJO







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First you laugh, then you cry, or sometimes you do both as you dissolve into a quivering jelly of pitiable emotion. Our review line-up should pretty much accomplish all this and more.

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Why We Are Great

No, seriously. We are.

JEFF GREEN EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

By nature, I am a self-deprecating guy. Some of that has to do with hating myself. The rest comes from the fact that I really am kind of an idiot. This is not a problem. The only real problem is when I let the deprecation seep too far into this magazine's personality. I mean, I hate it when magazines get all braggy and spend half the issue telling you how great they are. "Yeah, we know, you have our money already. Now shut up and entertain me." But I do want to take a moment now to tell you that I actually really like this issue. A lot. Sure, yeah, I wrote the cover story on *KOTOR 2*, so maybe I'm biased. But I probably still would have liked it (at least sort of) if one of the other goons here written it instead. OK, probably not. But still, that's not the point. The point is, we rule. Or at least, we rule when I write the stories. Also, check out our Overrated/Underrated feature, which was a lot of fun to write, and which hopefully will be fun to read and will inspire you to write us back with your own choices. Finally, this issue rules because it marks boy genius Ryan Scott's first issue as a full-time *CGW* editor. *KOTOR 2*, Overrated/Underrated, and Ryan Scott—three reasons why, this month at least, we are great.



KRISTEN SALVATORE
MANAGING EDITOR
Why is Kristen in a good mood? Not because Jeff made his deadlines, that's for sure. No, Kristen is happy because it's finally baseball season again, and with the exception of the damn Yankees (how many shortstops does one team need?!), all is right with the world. Go A's!



ROBERT COFFEY
EXECUTIVE EDITOR
Robert Coffey loved *Far Cry* right up until the point that he started hating it. Too bad. Here we thought we'd finally found a game to make him happy. But now he's all wrapped up in *City of Heroes*, where his heroine, Tiny Alice, is kicking arse bigtime.



DARREN GLADSTONE
SENIOR EDITOR
The "hardest-working" "man" in computer gaming. Darren compiled this month's ginormous E3 report and still had time to review *Unreal Tournament 2004*, which he liked a lot. He's also totally wrapped up in *City of Heroes*, which makes one wonder: Does Darren sleep?



WILLIAM O'NEAL
TECH EDITOR
Not only did Wil conduct the huge desktop PC roundup this month, but he actually did it mostly on time. Now he'll spend the rest of the month getting ready for all the people mad at him because of the results. It sucks to be Wil.



JOHNNY LIU
PREVIEWS EDITOR
We just found out that Johnny's *CGW* business card says Johnny Liu! with an exclamation point. Either he's excited to be him or we should be excited to know him. Johnny Liu (!) was seriously busy this month previewing *Tribes: Vengeance* and reviewing *Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow*.



RYAN SCOTT
CD-ROM EDITOR
This month, Ryan joins the *CGW* staff full time. What does this mean? This means we get to make fun of him for 40 hours a week instead of 20. It also means he's more available to buy Jeff coffee, do Jeff's expenses, and take Jeff's laundry to the dry cleaners. Welcome aboard, Ryan!



ROB SCHULTZ
ART DIRECTOR
Rob Schultz, like Kristen, is also happy that it's baseball season, but he's rooting for the Giants, not the A's. Which means that at some point this season, those two will get in a fight. We hope. Because with those two fighting, the rest of us can play games all day. Yay!



MICHAEL JENNINGS
ASSOCIATE ART DIRECTOR
Michael worked extra hard putting this magazine together. Every time he finished a section, we made him do it over. Not because we're jerks, but because sometimes, the magazine biz sucks. OK, and we're jerks. Everyone, thank Michael this month. We don't want him to quit.

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Letters

S&M = True love 4ever

I've been playing computer games for many years—my first was the original EGA *Police Quest One*. Adventure games have always been my favorite genre. Needless to say, in recent years, I've felt that computer games have passed me by (or, perhaps, the other way around). So when *S&M2* was announced, I was thrilled—a brand-new sequel to one of the best adventures of all time.

And then, out of nowhere, it was cancelled: "After careful evaluation of current marketplace realities and underlying economic considerations, we've decided that this was not the appropriate time to launch a graphic adventure on the PC."

Am I mistaken, or did not *Syberia* sell fairly well in the past year?

Hadn't *S&M2* already generated an enormous buzz, with press and gamers alike anxiously awaiting the product? Wasn't it positioned to be easily the best-selling adventure game of the past five years? Past 10?

I don't know why, but I'm not buying this "marketplace realities" explanation from LucasArts. What really happened to our favorite dog and rabbity thing?

Jason Mailloux

Sorry, Jason—try as we did to pay attention to your letter, we were constantly distracted by your referencing "S&M2." Dogs, rabbits, S&M, a "graphic adventure"—really, who could blame us? Please send "work-safe" e-mails from now on or you're going to get poor Ryan fired.

Crusader: No chance

A smile came to my face when I saw the screenshot from *Crusader: No Remorse* in the Name That Game section of your April 2004 issue. That was one of my favorite games of all time. Then I saw in your Pipeline section a remake of Sid Meier's *Pirates!*, another all-time great, and that got me thinking. I have two questions:



Does anybody own the rights to *Crusader*, and have you guys heard any rumors of any new *Crusader* games or remakes?

Kevin Manning

Sorry, Kevin—the whole beloved *Crusader* franchise is pretty much dead, which sucks. We'd love to see a new one just as much as you.

CGW out of touch?

I don't mean to be picky or anything, but there's just something that must be said: You really need to wait longer to close your magazine. You previewed *Mythica*, a game that was CANCELED WEEKS BEFORE I GOT THE ISSUE! You need to keep in touch with the times. Oh, and thanks for offering a contest for *Max Payne 2* mods...which I can't make because I don't have a DirectX 9 card. I'm so cynical, aren't I?

Zack Green

No, Zack, you're not cynical. You're a crybaby. Obviously, our coverage of *Mythica* seemed woefully out of date (though not as out of date as your 3D card), but the fact is that the game got canceled after we'd already carrier-pigeoned the calligraphy to the printer, who'd already set the type in his gigantic Gutenberg press. Thanks for whining!

Let's play the blame game!

Walk into your local Electronics Boutique and see the 30 different gaming magazines, each with in-depth previews that are becoming far more detailed than many of the reviews of published games. I make the leap of faith in assuming that you and your rivals aren't making this stuff up, which means you have to be bothering someone to get this information.

Considering the cancerouslike expansion in preview coverage over the past two years, the tumor is affecting the system! They aren't writing code if they're constantly answering questions. Let 'em work! Don't feed the egos until the product is finished! Hell, *Daikatana* might have been a better game, and *Duke Nukem* might be out (OK, I'm stretching it here).

Sam & Max, R.I.P.



I am extremely disappointed by LucasArts' decision to cancel the PC game *Sam & Max: Freelance Police*. I have purchased every PC adventure game created by LucasArts since the days of *Zak McKracken*. In the past, adventure games by LucasArts contained innovative characters, intriguing story lines, and ingenious plot twists. I truly enjoyed the original *Sam & Max* because of the wild and wacky sense of humor portrayed by the dog and that crazy rabbity thing. I was intending to buy this game but will now instead boycott LucasArts due to its lack of creativity/originality and poor quality of recently released titles.

Tony Wong

As huge *Sam & Max* fans, we were just as let down as you were, Tony. We were doubly disappointed to learn that production for *Star Wars: Episode III—The Total Sucking* is proceeding as planned. Life...she is not fair.

Mail Bites

This was the first issue in MONTHS not to have a fold-out ad behind the front cover. It's boggling my mind.

—William Hollar

Why do companies let marketing jackasses make development decisions without giving designers suitable input into how their game is being made?

—Colin Chude

ILLUSTRATION BY MICHAEL JENNINGS



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Yeah, it's less fun than going out to lunch with the designers, but....

Deathbouger

Hmmm....you just might not have a point, Deathbouger. Honestly, blaming us for *Daikatana* is like blaming your mom for mad cow disease. Still, if you'd like more strategy sections, here's one for your beloved *Daikatana*: Uninstall it. And just so we don't get in the way of the mindmeld at 3D Realms, here's our last ever preview of *Duke Nukem Forever*: Ain't gonna happen. Thanks for writing!

Bigger, better, faster

Few games ever influence us to upgrade our computers. I remember that these gems used to come about once every three years—those very special games we know will change our experience if we play them. They're like an itch you wanna scratch really, really bad. Here's my list of games that made me upgrade my PC so I could just play that damn game!

- *Day of the Tentacle*—I just couldn't help but wonder what this game sounded like, so I bought a soundcard.
- *Ultima 7*—Made me buy a new processor, and it took me three days to finally get a boot disk configuration good enough to make this game run.
- *Doom*—Had to get a new HD just to be able to play this game...then a new 486DX4 and lots of RAM. Occupied all four slots. WOW!
- *Diablo*—I dreaded the day I had to play games in that clunky Win95 OS I kept hearing about. I am a DOS fanboi! Intel had a funny name for that new 586 thingy, too. Hehehe....
- *Drakkan*—After seeing this game, I was screaming, "I need a new PC!" (I was playing *Quake 2* on a P200 with 2D cards...scary thought nowadays.)

Servantes on 1UP.com

CGW out of touch?—Part II

i was very excited to read about *mythic* [*sic*] in your April issue, but very disappointed when i went to the site and found out it is no longer available. i just wonder how this happened. someone was not paying attention or something. this is an up-to-date mag and should not highly praise a game that no one can play. i am an avid online game player and am always looking for a good online game, but this was not a very well-planned-out article. also, if online games want to survive, they need to advertise where the majority of the public will see it. there is a very large following for online games, and *mythica* would have succeeded if they had reached more people. just my two cents. good luck for future endeavors.

summer ratliff

While we've already explained how our *Mythica* preview ran after the game's cancellation, we felt we owed it to you, Summer, to let you in on a little secret: If you hold the Shift key down while typing, you'll get capital letters. It's like magic!

A cry for help

To whom it may concern,

I have no idea how this magazine started showing up in my mailbox, but this is a second attempt to unsubscribe. Please, someone help me.

Shawn Phelps

Thanks for your interest in *CGW*, Shawn! We'll be extending your subscription by five years as you've requested. Please pay our invoice promptly or we'll have your official credit rating seriously downgraded. Welcome aboard!

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Kendell Howard

Honestly, Kendell—you had us at "Visit Correctional Facilities!" A couple things you should know: Robert won't join unless he gets to sacrifice animals, and Jeff was wondering if he could be a high priest in the Church of the Poisoned Mind.



Mail Bites

I have taken a solemn vow to avoid all things *Sim* and never buy even one of those games. They are obviously a cosmic plot to take over what is left of all functioning brains on this planet. —Granniegamer on 1UP.com

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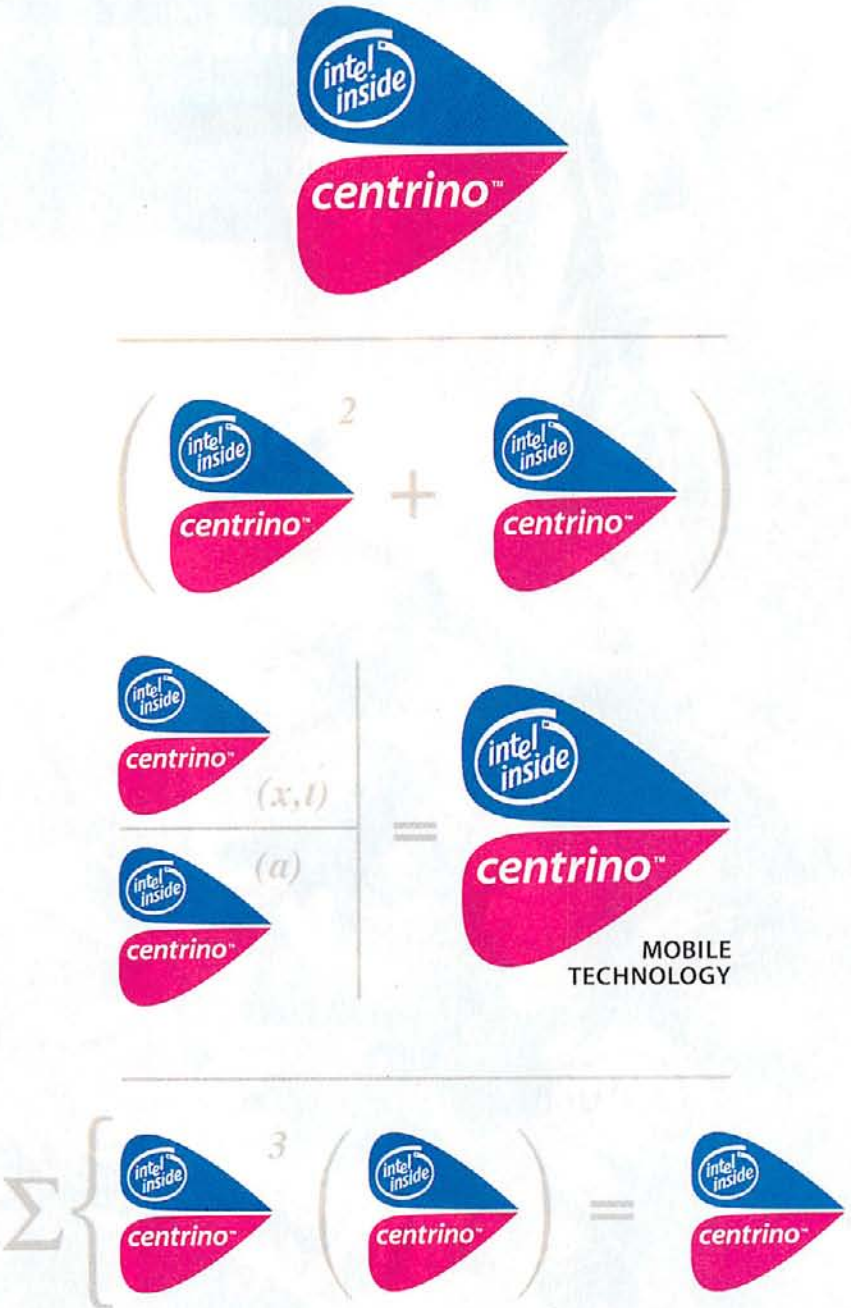
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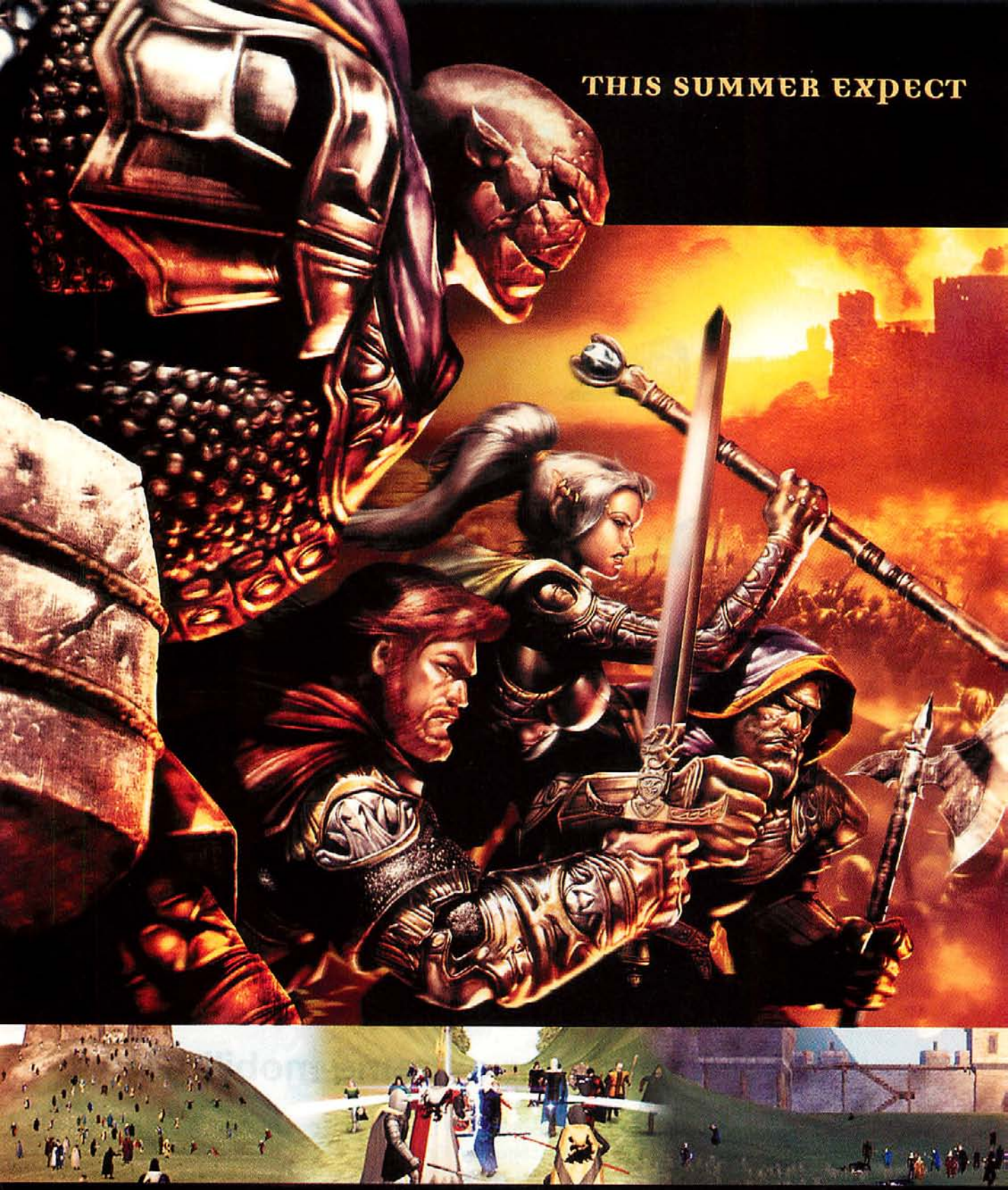


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- Alienware Aurora, Computer Gaming World Editors' Choice Award, January 2004



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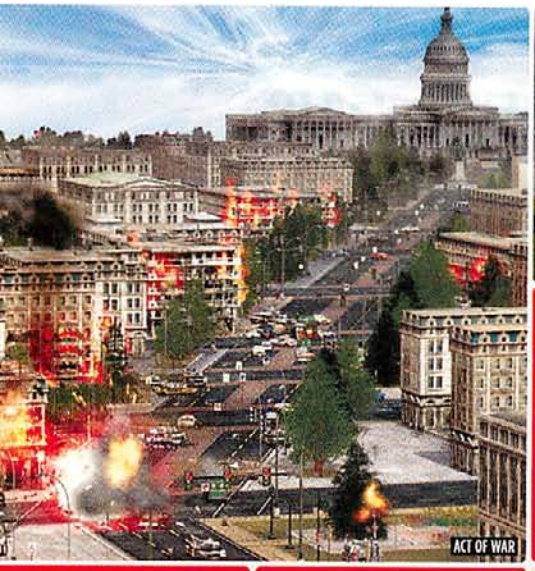
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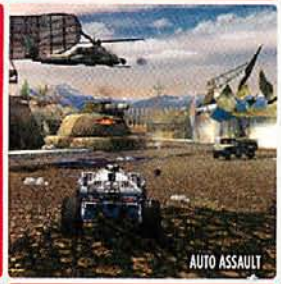
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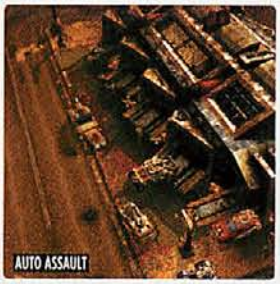








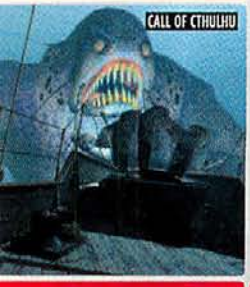




PRE-3

The 2004 Sc

Your inside track to E3's hottest games



Every year around this time, game publishers pack up their bags and head to Los Angeles for the Electronic Entertainment Expo, aka E3. It's a headache-inducing, booze-fueled three days that has us simultaneously seeing stars and all the new games on the horizon.

But why wait to report on what's there? We've eavesdropped on conversations, slipped GHB to game designers (not a pretty sight, trust us), and pieced together shredded top-secret documents to find out most of what will be on display. You get a taste of what we're expecting to see, and instead of a big, boring pile, we've even separated the good from the bad. Obviously, plenty of stuff will still surprise us on the show floor, but here are this year's potential players!

Inside



Happy B-day
PlanetSide turns 1 and decides to celebrate by giving *us* the presents.



Wedding Bells
FFXI introduces a new way to enjoy the sacred institution of marriage: by making you pay through the nose for it.



Misadventure
Is it "game over" for the classic adventure genre? We take a close look at the facts to find out.



The Young Bloods

New games we can't wait to see

Act of War. Atari

EARLY ROUND DRAFT PICK Everyone makes a big deal about Tom Clancy-based games, but check out this RTS based on an upcoming book by Dale Brown. It promises a dynamic story mode that'll have you waging war on the home front and overseas.
WE SAY: RTS games are due for a major shift, and this looks promising.

Armies of Exigo. EA

A multitiered RTS title that lets you wage war on multiple levels.
WE SAY: *Metal Fatigue* tried something similar a few years ago. Will we say "Leggo my *Exigo*?" We dunno.



Auto Assault. NCsoft

EARLY ROUND DRAFT PICK A *Road Warrior* MMORPG? Sign us up! Kit out and hop into your own customized ride (motorcycles, semis, and so on) so you can roll with countless others online.
WE SAY: We love the idea. We've been waiting for something like this since *Autoduel* for the Apple II.

Baker. Ubisoft

EARLY ROUND DRAFT PICK Let's put together a World War II first-person shooter with lots of scripted sequences! It may not be wholly original, but it boasts good looks and unique squadmates who talk to and update you throughout this intuitive tactical shooter based on a true story.
WE SAY: Considering Gearbox's track record on PC—hello, *NightFire* and *Halo*—we're a little concerned, but we like what we see here.

The Bard's Tale. VU Games

EARLY ROUND DRAFT PICK A hack-n-slash action game based on the classic RPG series? It appears to have the depth and humor of the old games, not to mention some of the game legends that started the series. So what's not to like?
WE SAY: Well, the fact that it's based on the console-friendly *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance* engine could be one issue. Still, we've got high hopes here.

Call of Duty: United Offensive. Activision

EARLY ROUND DRAFT PICK Now here's a real shocker: There's an expansion in the works for *Call of Duty*. United Offensive puts you in several new soldiers' shoes and even lets you fly the unfriendly skies. Expect hairy ball-gunning sequences ripped from *Memphis Belle*.
WE SAY: The original game was awesome and loaded with tensely scripted events, but it was notoriously short. We'll probably get more of the same here—and love it—come fall. We look forward to seeing what developer Grey Matter has in store.

Cops 2170. Strategy First

Somewhere between *X-Com* and *Syndicate Wars*, this strategy game shows promise with a large, interactive world, vehicles you control, plenty of quests, and the obligatory RPG-like character development.
WE SAY: More strategy games!





outing Report





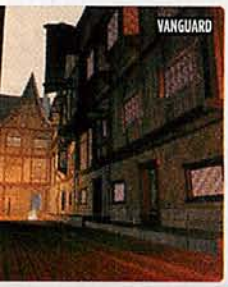
Dungeon Lords, Dreamcatcher

A dungeon-crawl with FPS-control leanings makes for interesting real-time combat and eight-person multiplayer adventures.
WE SAY: What got our attention here: a nod to old-school gamers. DW Bradley is the man behind *Dungeon Lords*.

Dungeon Siege II, Microsoft

EARLY ROUND DRAFT PICK A bigger and bolder *Dungeon Siege* is on its way for the holidays. There are promises of smarter A.I. to keep you on your toes, more powerful and varied allies, new Heroic Power supermoves specific to each character class, gorgeous graphics, and a dynamic world that changes as you progress.
WE SAY: Seems like a whole lot of thought and work is going into *Dungeon Siege II*, and we couldn't be happier. They just have to tweak gameplay so that you aren't fighting on autopilot.

Empire Earth 2, VU Games



The ambitious RTS series is back for more, according to the word on the street. You'll be able to build one of 14 civilizations from the dawn of time to the 23rd century, with additional unique powers, leaders, and more.
WE SAY: This is all still very hush-hush and quite a ways out—as in, sometime in 2005.

Ghost Recon 2, Ubisoft

EARLY ROUND DRAFT PICK More good stuff, less bad. Want to learn more? Turn to page 27.
WE SAY: Wil wants this to be good. Please don't make him cry, Mr. Clancy.

Heroes of the Pacific, Encore Software

Reports are coming in of the over-the-top World War II dogfighting in this game. The tech demo apparently boasts hundreds of planes gunning for each other at the same time—and that's just the console version!
WE SAY: We'll believe it when we see it, but it sure sounds good.

Imperator, Mythic Games

The Roman Empire never faded away. In fact, it's alive and well today. That's the premise behind this MMO that takes a whole new look at the history books.
WE SAY: The guys behind *Dark Ages of Camelot* could be on to something, but the game isn't coming out until 2005.

Pacific Fighters, Ubisoft

You know that little game *IL-2 Sturmovik*? Well, it's breaking out of the European theater and going kamikaze on your asses.
WE SAY: Combat flight sims don't have the cache they once did, but the *IL-2* team makes us believe we can fly.

Pariah, Groove Games

EARLY ROUND DRAFT PICK Digital Extremes is moving beyond the *Unreal* franchise (and Atari, for that matter) by using a "highly modified version of the *UT 2003* code" to create a different kind of first-person shooter: survival-action in the future. With a huge focus on the single-player experience, the plan is to make you care about your less-than-super alter ego who's just trying to survive. According to one source: Think *The Running Man*.
WE SAY: They've been quietly working on this one for two years now. There's more we learned about *Pariah*, we just need to see it for ourselves before we start gushing.









Worst idea ever!

Zoo Vet 3D

Live the thrilling life of a veterinarian! We want a list of everyone who actually buys this game. So we can tag them.

Pirates, Atari

EARLY ROUND DRAFT PICK Can we technically call this young blood? Sid Meier is bringing back his swashbuckling action/adventure/strategy game for a whole new generation (and a crotchety older one).
WE SAY: Hopefully, it will deliver gold where *Pirates of the Caribbean* hit the rocks.

Star Wars: Knight of the Old Republic 2, LucasArts

EARLY ROUND DRAFT PICK Jedi-ing done right.
WE SAY: Read the cover story!

Tabula Rasa, NCsoft

"Players fight against the demonic alien hordes for the freedom of the galaxy using their futuristic mystical powers." Um, yeah. The game promises squad-based, replayable experiences that will take you behind enemy lines and on covert missions.
WE SAY: From the artist formerly known as Lord British comes an interesting idea. We just need to see it in action.

Vanguard, Microsoft

The *EverQuest* team is reuniting in Redmond to work on a new massively multiplayer online game that it insists will be a lot more than just "*EQ* done better." As it was put to us, it's not just about the destination, but the journey as well. (You can own a boat and fight off buccaneers on the high seas while traveling.)
WE SAY: Sounds good, but here's hoping Microsoft doesn't can this MMO a year down the road.

Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War, THQ

EARLY ROUND DRAFT PICK Is it just us or does the *WarCraft* universe look a lot like *Warhammer*'s? Still, this looks tight: huge battles, brilliant graphics, and a deep campaign with four unique races.
WE SAY: Good job, Relic. What we've seen so far is sweet and has loads of flavor.

The Old-timers

Our take on games you know about and wish would ship already



Advent Rising, Majesco
A sweeping epic adventure that'll span three games. It looks cool, but there's a lot that needs to be done before the game can ship this September. We predict delays.

Battle for Middle-earth, EA
The more we see of this game and the new directions it's taking in the RTS genre, the more we like it.

Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth, Bethesda Softworks
We're still waiting for our chance to crack open H.P. Lovecraft's *Necronomicon*.

Doom 3, Activision
"It'll be ready when it's ready." Whatever.



EverQuest II, SOE
There's a major overhaul for Norrath come September. Also, old *EQ* players should keep their eyes peeled. A new graphics engine slowly being integrated will update all the graphics from the old game.

Evil Genius, VU Games
Tweaked and plotting a fall release, this game is looking diabolically fun.

Full Spectrum Warrior, THQ
This unique strategy game came out of nowhere last year and impressed many with unique controls and squad-based fighting.

Guild Wars, NCsoft
We've given these guys props for coming up with a great concept for an action-RPG. What you probably didn't know is that they've got a tournament in store during E3 this year. During the three days of the show, you can sign up, download, and play nine missions.

Half-Life 2, VU Games
Valve swears the game is coming out. We're waiting until the box is in our hands.

The Matrix Online, TBD
Someone swallowed the red pill and will publish this. Can it save the series, though?

The Movies, Activision
Though we were skeptical at first, Molyneux's creative take on Hollywood could be an interesting distraction.

Rome: Total War, Activision
Epic RTS done right? We'll see.



The Sims 2, EA
It's time for some hot Sim-on-Sim action!

S.T.A.L.K.E.R., THQ
We spotted this gem long before THQ scooped it up. Where's our royalty?

Star Wars Galaxies: Space, LucasArts
We're glad to see that a certain galaxy far, far away is making some much-needed improvements. Namely, tweaking the whole Jedi experience and not making it a chore to accomplish. The spaceships kinda help, too.

Star Wars Republic Commando, LucasArts
This Clancy-esque take on the elite clone troopers has us standing at attention.

Vampire: The Masquerade—Bloodlines, Activision
The game will probably be ready before *Half-Life 2*, the source of *Vampire*'s code, and we're anticipating taking a bite.

World of WarCraft, Blizzard
We almost don't want the upcoming MMO to ship at this point because we know that we'll be hooked. **Darren Gladstone**

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Shot heard 'round the world

PlanetSide has seven-day war—and more—for birthday

***PlanetSide*, the first "successful" massively multiplayer first-person shooter, shipped at this time last year. Today, Sony Online Entertainment says more than 50,000 people still log on every month. We're wondering, though, is if this endless cycle of war will ever end.**

"Not by a long shot," confirms producer Raja Altenhoff. In fact, for the game's first anniversary during the week of May 17, SOE plans to stage the largest battle ever. To do this, it's reactivating the accounts of anybody who has ever played the game. It doesn't matter whether you quit or not—you'll be able to sign in and play for the entire week, according to Altenhoff.

More important are plans for the future, which include a free major update to wash the taste of the *Core Combat* expansion out of our mouths. The usual balancing tweaks are in store, but SOE also plans to add slightly faster-paced "*Counter-Strike*-style" play in a tournament mode. Two teams from two different factions will be able to square off on smaller maps. And to help see who is best, there are plans to add stat tracking (kill-to-death ratios, amount of time played per session, and so on) to the entire game. How this will be carried out has yet to be determined, as SOE is in the middle of planning stages, but we've been assured that it'll happen by late this summer.



Tournament-style gameplay, to be introduced by the fall, could look like this.

Another long-overdue change is giving people more incentives to play after reaching BR20. Still in the planning stages, don't expect to see this change until late 2004. **Darren Gladstone**

DOMO ARIGATO

Bot to the future

Starsiege mod set to complement *Tribes* with a vengeance

Mech fans, rejoice! A new *Starsiege* campaign is in the works and you won't have to shell out a dime for it. Why? Because it may come in the box with *Tribes: Vengeance*. *Starsiege 2845* is a total conversion mod centered on giant-robot mech and vehicle combat. New vehicles also populate the game, presenting players with plenty of different options and combat roles.

Though *Starsiege 2845* is being designed by the fan-made Clancore Design Group, the project has received Sierra's full support. In fact, the mod has been in development for roughly nine months—right alongside *Tribes Vengeance*. Among the professional talent attached to *SS 2845* is original *Starsiege* creator Blake Hutchins, who has penned a brand-new single-player campaign that continues the ongoing story of humanity's struggle against the mechanical cybrid menace. In addition to the single-player campaign, several new multiplayer modes are available, including a number of capture-the-flag and deathmatch variations. Ryan Scott

The Good, the Bad & the Ugly

News and views from the Wild West



The Good

Return of the fragfests!

Man, have we been dying to frag each other again here at *CGW*. All that latent hostility...well, OK, maybe not so latent. We hate each other pretty openly. So it's great news that after a too-long lull, we suddenly have two great multiplayer shooters in which to destroy each other all day long: *Battlefield Vietnam* and *Unreal Tournament 2004*. Any typos, bad grammar, or other lameness in this issue? Blame it on those two games. Yay!



The Bad

E3

Right around the time you read this, the *CGW* editors will be piling into the company clown car to make the annual pilgrimage to the Electronic Entertainment Expo in Los Angeles, where all the big game publishers will bombard us with overwrought, too-loud, superficial demonstrations of games we've already seen or games that will never come out—or both. Other than that, though, we love E3! Thank goodness we never get bitter!



The Ugly

***Sam & Max* cancelled**

LucasArts doesn't just announce games anymore—it announces them and then cancels them! On the heels of the *Full Throttle 2* cancellation comes the news that the *Sam & Max* remake, which was looking fantastic, is a no-go. LucasArts cites an uncertain market for adventure games, but man, how do you know if you don't even try? A heartbreaking, gutless decision.

But how do we REALLY feel about the ignominious death of the adventure game? Flip over a couple pages to read about the adventure game blues.





■ FIRING LINE

Who Ya Gonna Call?

Ghost Recon is back for another tour of duty. Draft us!







Christian Allen, designer of _Ghost Recon 2_, is gunning to create a whole new experience for modern-warfare first-person shooters. A good story, good scenarios, better A.I., and improved graphics should slake the blood lust of gamers craving more realism in their firefights. We got the high-level word from developer Red Storm about what's on active duty for the upcoming sequel to _Ghost Recon_.

Campaigns and game modes

In the past, gamers quelled uprisings in the former Soviet Union and incursions in Cuba. _Ghost Recon 2_ will involve you in an international crisis that leads to a major showdown between foreign powers. Expect a standard single-player campaign in which completing missions improves your team's attributes and unlocks new characters and weapons. And all you wheelmen can actually use the vehicles this time around. In addition to the standard campaign mode, _Ghost Recon 2_ will also feature recon, defend, and firefight modes that were in the previous game.

Smart A.I.

Gamers who have played _Ghost Recon_ on PS2 already enjoy the ability to give voice commands to teammates; PC gamers can expect to see voice commands in _Ghost Recon 2_. This, combined with a new orders system, is an attempt to make the Ghosts a more cohesive unit. While the enemy A.I. in the _Ghost Recon_ games has sometimes been hit or miss, Ubisoft promises deep improvements to both the team and enemy A.I. in _Ghost Recon 2_. And for all you green recruits, Red Storm eases you in with early missions that have you following orders from an A.I.-controlled hero character.

How does it look?

If there's anything that has plagued the _Ghost Recon_ games, it's (for lack of a better description) the fact that they're not terribly pretty. Ubisoft is addressing this issue in _Ghost Recon 2_ by promising us "top-notch" graphics that include per-pixel and dynamic lighting, multitexture rendering, specular and environment mapping, and improved outdoor environments. While the gameplay of the _Ghost Recon_ games has always been highly realistic, the environments haven't always been held up to a similar standard. Hopefully, trees will now look like trees and water will behave like...well, like water. The _Ghost Recon 2_ team also claims to have completely revamped the particle-effect system, which means that explosions will be more spectacular than they've been in previous titles. Plus, the game now employs a new animation system. ■ **William O'Neal**

"★★★★★"
—Maxim

"Best Action Game"
—Spike TV Video Game Awards









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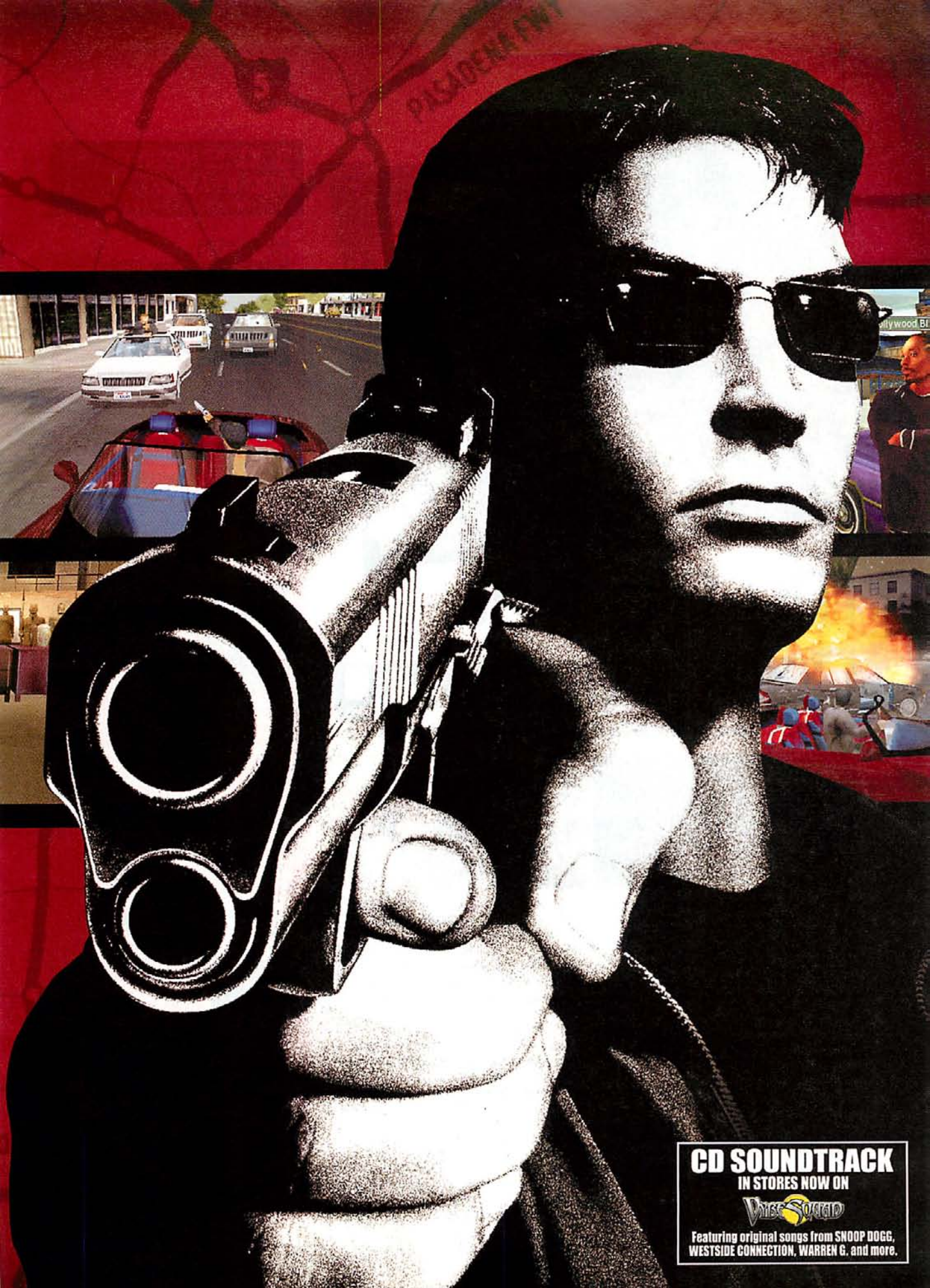
The way it's meant to be played NVIDIA

PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

MATURE 17+ M CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood and Gore
Mature Sexual Themes
Strong Language
Violence

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WE DO...NOT

My Big Fat Dork Wedding

Getting hitched online is as complex as the real thing





In most MMORPGs, getting hitched to the troglodyte of your dreams is as easy as petitioning a game master, waiting the required few days, then calling a clan meeting. But the folks at Square Enix have imbued *Final Fantasy XI* with more red tape than a same-sex marriage. Prospective couples must fill out an online form two weeks to three months before the anticipated ceremony. Plus, depending on how elaborate they want to get, they'll have to drop anywhere from 20,000 to 80,000 gil (*FFXI*'s in-game currency). Money ain't easy to get in *FFXI*, so that's a pretty big commitment. [As opposed to that whole "marriage commitment" thing—*Ed.*]

The good news is that the ceremonies seem to be a whole lot more elaborate than those in any other game. The aesthetics differ based on the couple's nationality, and most will include free wedding bands for the participants, as well as fireworks to set off after the ceremony. Each of the game's major cities has a few sites designated for weddings, with capacities ranging from 10 participants in the smallest ceremonies to 36 in the largest. Also, be sure to have a trusted friend come along—at least one attendant is required to guide guests through the ceremony, assist the priest, and escort the bride down the isle.

A few questions remain: Can sexless galka marry one another? How about mithra, the female-only cat people? We don't yet know, but we urge bold social pioneers to give it a shot and send us screenshots if you're successful. *FFXI*'s wedding service isn't set to go live for North American players yet, so you've got a little while to get your scratch together. **Miguel Lopez**

5, 10, 15 Years Ago in *CGW*

What we said when you were nursing



5 Years Ago, June 1999

We had two covers for our then-annual 501 cheats issue—one with "501 Cheats" in big letters, and one with Max Payne doing a shoot-dodge, firing twin Uzis in a subway. But instead of seeing a DEA agent in a leather coat in a subway, a lot of outraged readers saw a guy in a black trench coat in a school hallway. This issue hit newsstands about four days after the Columbine shootings, and emotions, understandably, were raw. If we could have, we would have shipped with a different cover, but it was too late, and a deluge of hate mail followed for months.



10 Years Ago, June 1994

You sure couldn't argue with the *CGW* Premier Awards—well, except for the dork-tacular name and the profoundly strange decision to announce the best games of the previous year smack-dab in the middle of the current one. And the brilliant move to publish actual photos of the extreme-makeover candidates responsible for those games. Still, it read like a list of defining moments in gaming: *Prince of Persia 2*, *Gabriel Knight: Sins of the Fathers*, *Day of the Tentacle*, *Betrayal at Krondor*, and a little thing we like to call *Doom*.



15 Years Ago, June 1989

Who could resist such a challenge? It was as if your very manhood were being called into question, right there on page 45: "I am Sargon, and I challenge YOU...." Such a cunning marketing ploy, using a sixth-grader's portrait of a...well, we guess it's a knight, to shame people into playing a computer chess game! Genius! Nothing screams "quality chess challenge" more than a piece of "sub Motel 6 caliber" paint slathering. Ah, the golden age of computer gaming—wasn't it horribly embarrassing?


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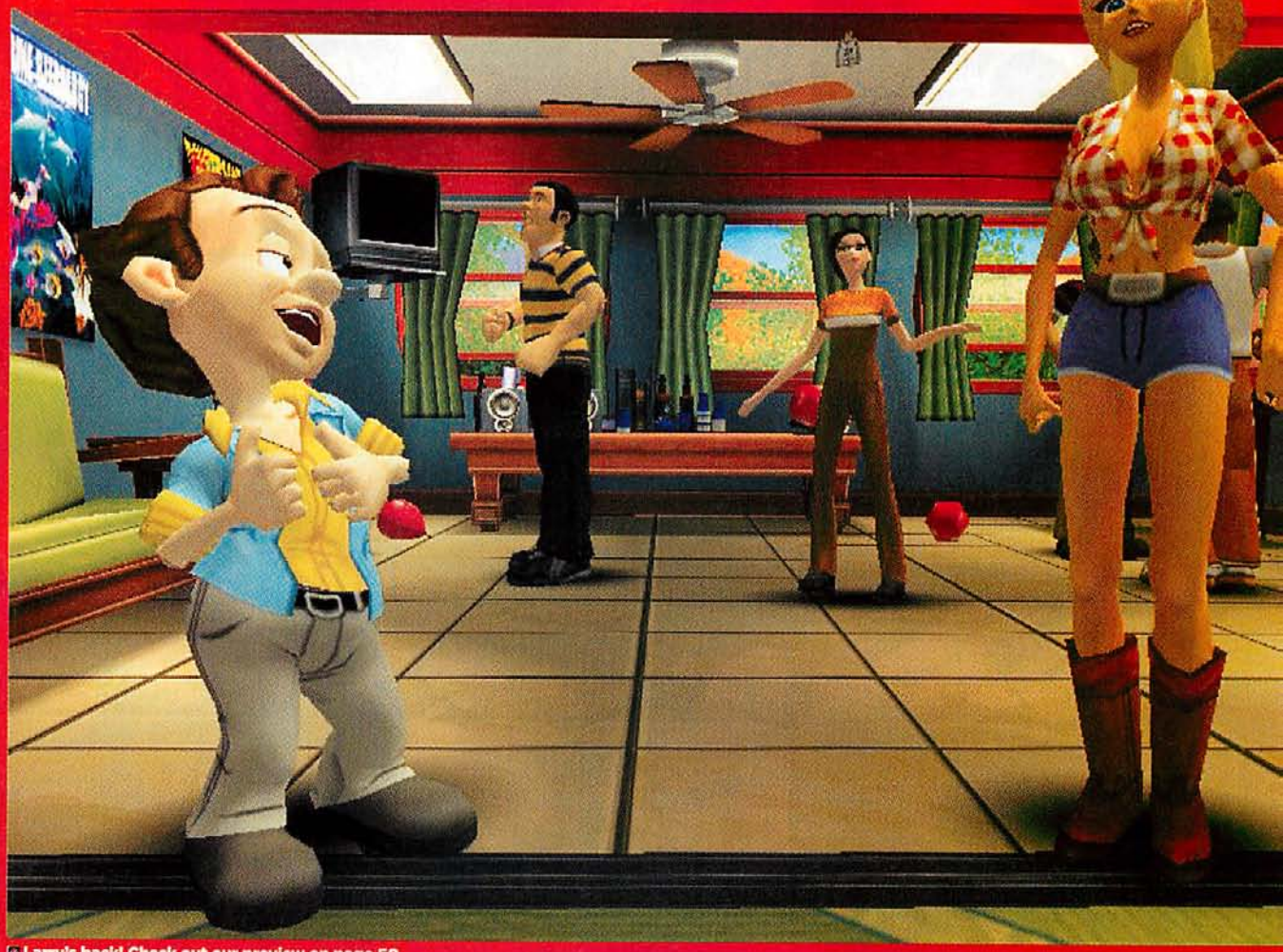
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GET FLASK

Adventure Gam

Do people still play these things?



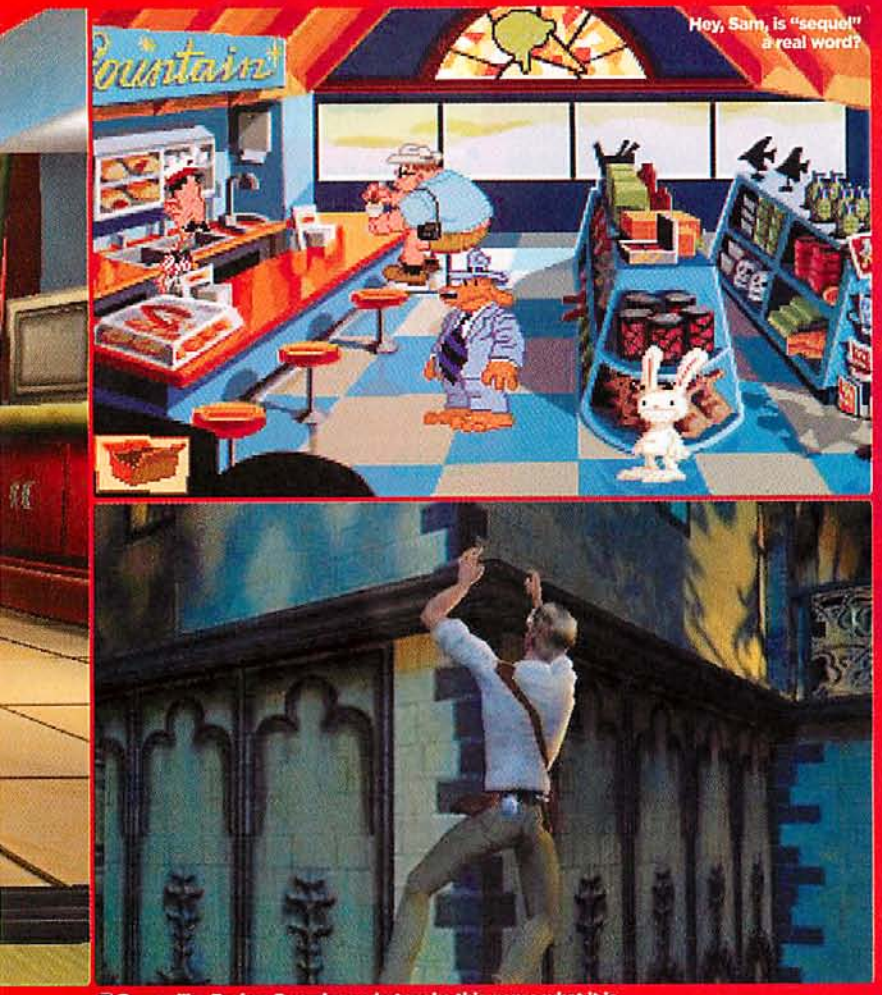
Larry's back! Check out our preview on page 50.

We've got some bad news for all of you out there eagerly awaiting *Sam & Max: Freelance Police*. Sadly, LucasArts has canceled the sequel to 1993's *Sam & Max Hit the Road*. The official statement cites a "careful evaluation of current marketplace realities" as the motivating force behind the decision, which series creator Steve Purcell describes as "mystifying" in an e-mail correspondence with the maintainers of the unofficial *Sam & Max* website (www.samandmax.net). "I'm extremely frustrated and disappointed, especially for the team who has devoted so much effort and creativity to *Sam & Max*," Purcell's e-mail reads. "It's a shame to think that their accomplishments will all go to waste due to this shortsighted decision."

This isn't the first time in recent memory that LucasArts has dropped the executioner's ax on an adventure-game project. *Full Throttle: Hell on Wheels* was also canceled late last year, allegedly due to a number of design-related issues. Though it's got little to do with *Sam & Max*, we can't help but notice a trend here—are adventure games really that much of a financial risk for game publishers?

There are still a few companies out there who hold some love for the genre. Sierra, once a kingpin among adventure-game developers, recently revealed an upcoming sequel to its classic *Leisure Suit Larry* franchise. As in many of its classic titles, Sierra's goal is to tell a good story—something that Joshua VanVeld, the game's producer, notes as a key element in any adventure game's success. "The ultimate goal is to tell a specific story and to create a world that people are going to be excited about exploring," he says. "Adventure games are entertaining in the same way movies are. A game like *Doom 3* might have an engaging story, but that isn't really a priority in those games. With games like *Larry*, the story and the per-

e Blues



Games like *Broken Sword* are what make this genre what it is.

sonal goals are what really drive the gameplay experience."

Saved games

Meanwhile, The Adventure Company continues to churn out adventure games at a steady pace. Though many of the company's titles are pretty hit-or-miss, there are a few gems to be had from its efforts. For a couple good examples, check out the recent *Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon* and *Dark Fall: The Journal*. If there's any doubt about the viability of adventure games in the marketplace, products like these two are nothing short of a shining ray of hope for the genre.

Renata Richardson, lead product manager at The Adventure Company, certainly feels that the adventure-game market is active and growing. "I think there's definite potential for the adventure market," she says. "I don't think adventure gaming is going anywhere. It's evolving, and that's it. I think there will always be a demand for games that challenge the mind, that make you think. Adventure games fill a need, and we're happy to provide products to fill that need." With comments like this, it sounds like there's still a healthy market for these types of games. Just don't hold your breath for a *Maniac Mansion 3*. **Ryan Scott**

The Nerd Herd

Street geeks speak

What is the most overrated current trend in PC gaming?



Amy Hoskins
WATERFORD, CT
I hate all these pay-to-play online games. I mean, I've played plenty of online games that haven't charged me anything (*Unreal Tournament*). Nobody should have to pay extra for *The Sims Online*.



Aaron Ko
SAN FRANCISCO, CA
I can do without "realism" in my videogames, especially FPS games. Why simulate brutal, hard-hitting football when you can actually (gasp) go outside and play football?



Marcus Eikenberry
PORTLAND, OR
MMORPGs. All new ones claim to be the next killer one. In the last few years, not one of them has lived up to all that hype. At this point, I doubt any will. I'm still waiting for that real killer one.



Seth Welch
DALY CITY, CA
It's got to be how short some games are today. I got more info and spent more time reading my cereal box this morning than I do playing 'em.



Michael Hawash
HOUSTON, TX
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DVD

Bubba Ho-Tep

Elvis and JFK team up to take on a mummy—what's not to like about that? Let's backtrack a little so you can wrap your head around the craziest movie concept we've ever witnessed.

Elvis, king of rock 'n' roll, hasn't died—he's alive, but stuck in a rest home. An African-American man who thinks he's John F. Kennedy resides in this same joint.

Who better to join forces and combat a soul-stealing mummy that's feasting on world-weary retirees? Can the two stop this Bubba Ho-Tep before it's too late?

In the same vein as the classic *Evil Dead* movies, *Bubba Ho-Tep* is a dark comedy to be reckoned with. The undisputed king of the B movie, Bruce Campbell, plays the old liverworts-ridden king of rock 'n' roll with style, and, as he does in the *Evil Dead* series, makes this movie gold with instant classic one-liners. Ossie Davis also does a great job as someone who thinks he's our 35th president. It's a fresh idea, and it's fresh out on DVD, loaded with deleted scenes and two commentary tracks. Definitely pick this one up.



MUSIC

Jet – Get Born

Whoever says rock is dead needs a stereophonic boot in the ass, and these are the guys to deliver it. The driving beats and raw rhythms call to mind bands such as the Ramones and the Rolling Stones and are equally perfect for cruising down the road or blowing away the competition in *UT2004* (well, not the slow songs, but you get the idea).

MANGA & ANIME

Initial D



For fans of import speedsters and *Need for Speed Underground*, *Initial D* lauds the joys of drift racing. The story revolves around tricked-out cars, fast women, and Tak, a tofu delivery kid who turns out to be the wickedest thing behind a wheel. On the winding roads of Mount Akina, Tak proves his mettle in his Eighty-Six. Check out the comic books (manga) and the anime series or play the networked racing game at your local arcade.



HIGHBROW CINEMA

The Triplets of Belleville

A weird and wonderful animated French film, *The Triplets of Belleville* is an 80-minute tour de force you can't help but love. A hapless shlub trains for the Tour de France with his loyal dog and whistle-blowing grandmother in tow. The wildly inventive hand-drawn animation and toe-tapping jazz score make this one a minor classic.



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TEEN T CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Comic Mischief
Mild Fantasy Violence

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CGW Top 20

Wasted time well spent

Rank	Game	Rating
1	Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic (LucasArts)	★★★★★
2	Call of Duty (Activision)	★★★★½
3	Final Fantasy XI (Square Enix)	★★★★★
4	Battlefield 1942: Secret Weapons of WWII (EA)	★★★★½
5	Prince of Persia: TSOT (Ubisoft)	★★★★½
6	Max Payne 2 (Rockstar Games)	★★★★½
7	Age of Mythology: The Titans (Microsoft)	★★★½★
8	The Simpsons: Hit & Run (Vivendi)	★★★★½
9	Beyond Good & Evil (Ubisoft)	★★★★½
10	Deus Ex: Invisible War (Eidos)	★★½★







Rank	Game	Rating
11	Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King (EA)	★★★★★
12	Freedom Fighters (EA)	★★★★★
13	Madden NFL 2004 (EA)	★★★★½
14	Civilization III: Conquests (Atari)	★★★★½
15	Need for Speed Underground (EA)	★★★★½
16	Dungeon Siege: Legends of Aranna (Microsoft)	★★★½★
17	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4 (Aspyr)	★★★★★
18	Tron 2.0 (Buena Vista Interactive)	★★★★½
19	Counter-Strike: Condition Zero (Vivendi)	★★★½★
20	SimCity 4: Rush Hour (EA)	★★★★★

Survey results of games from the last six months. To vote, go to www.computergaming.com.

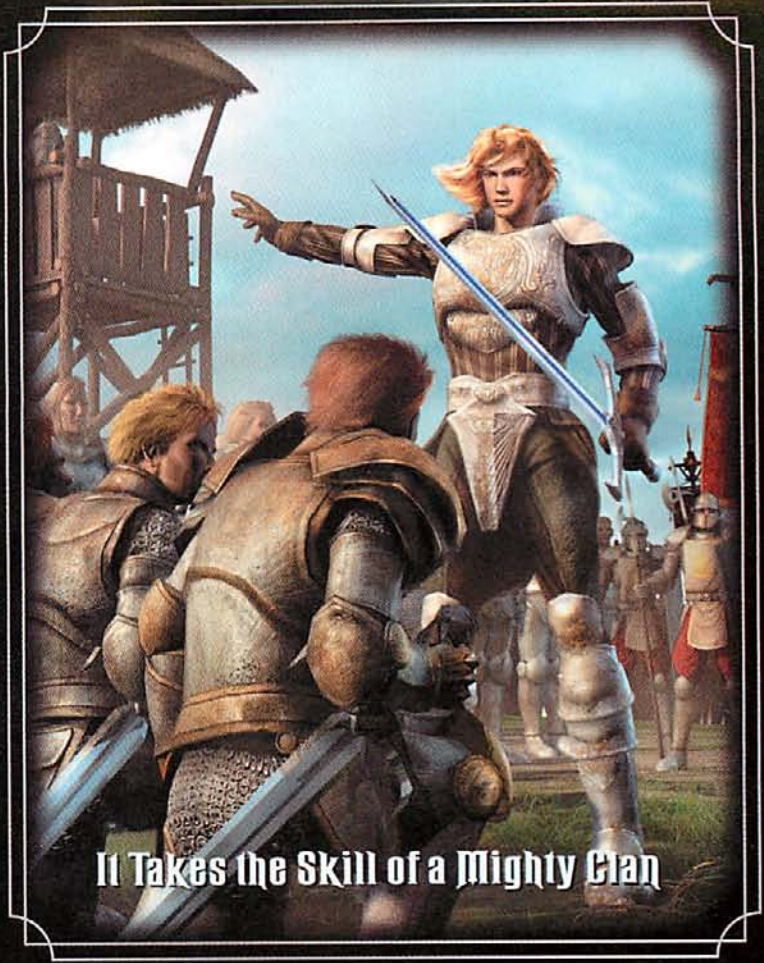
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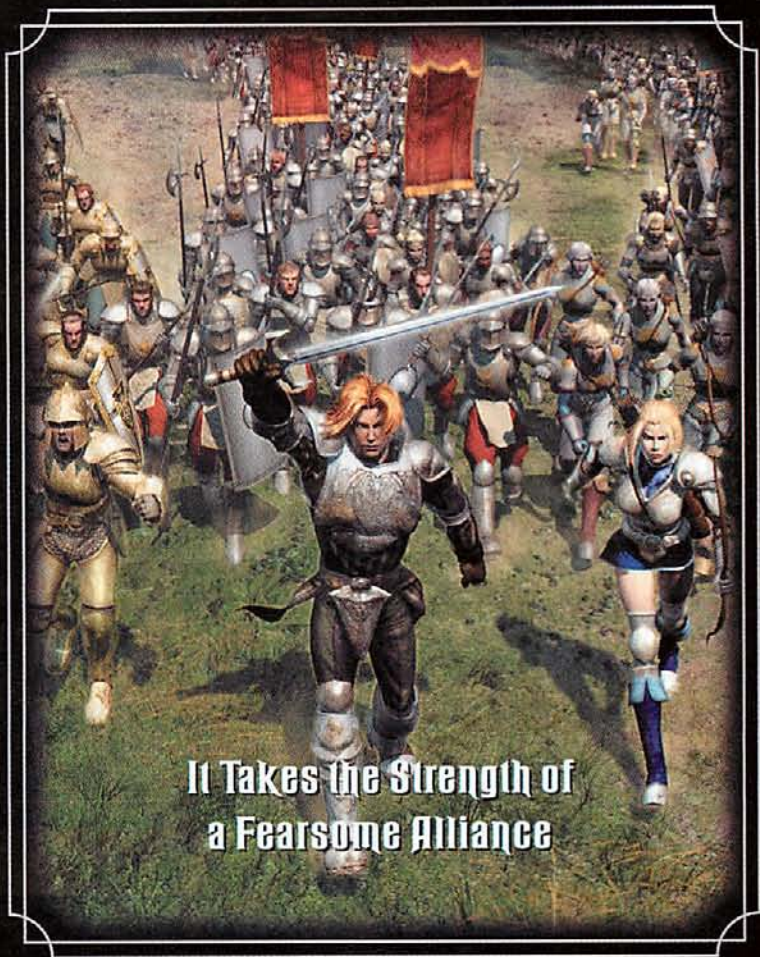
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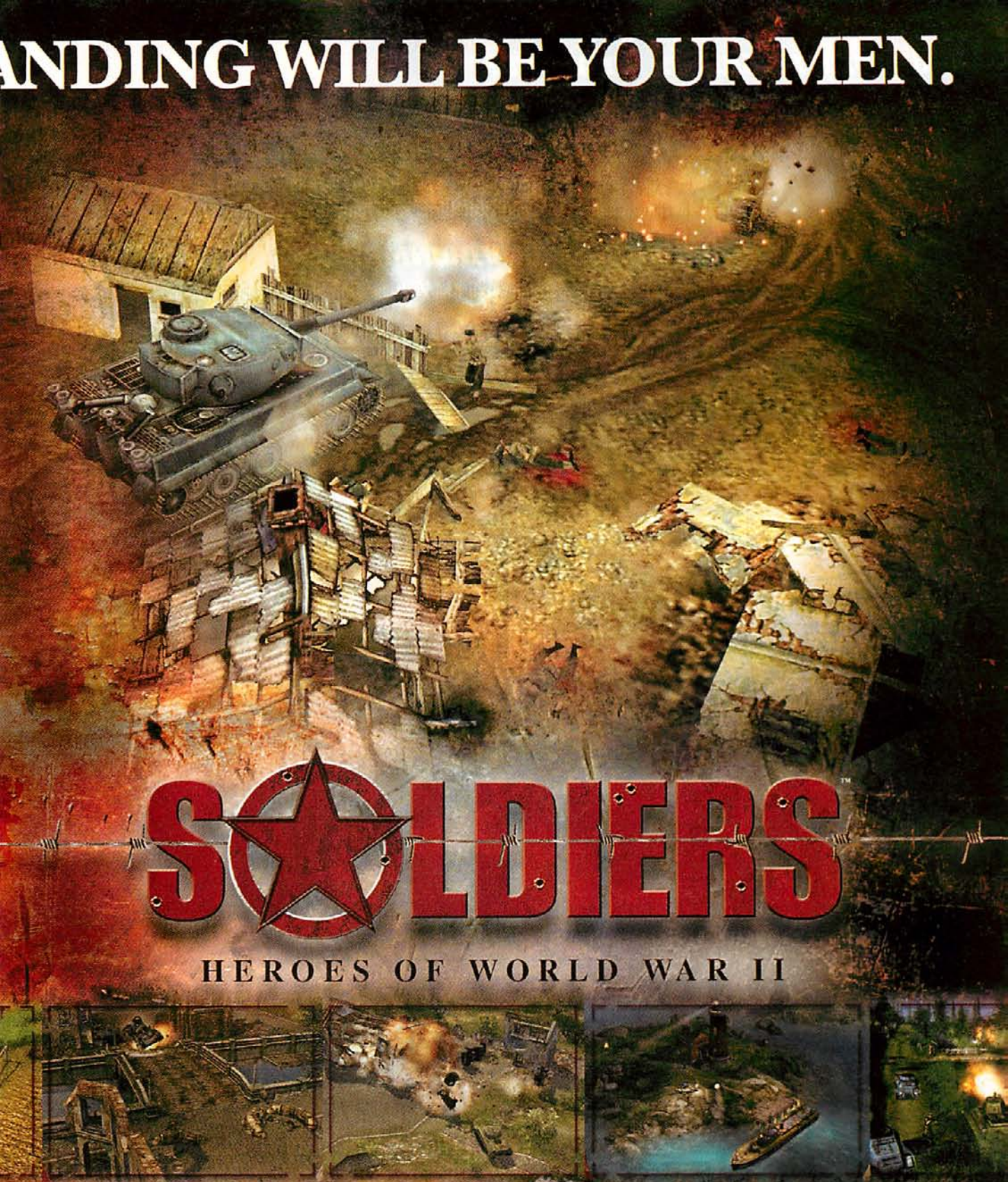
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– PC GAMER, March 2004

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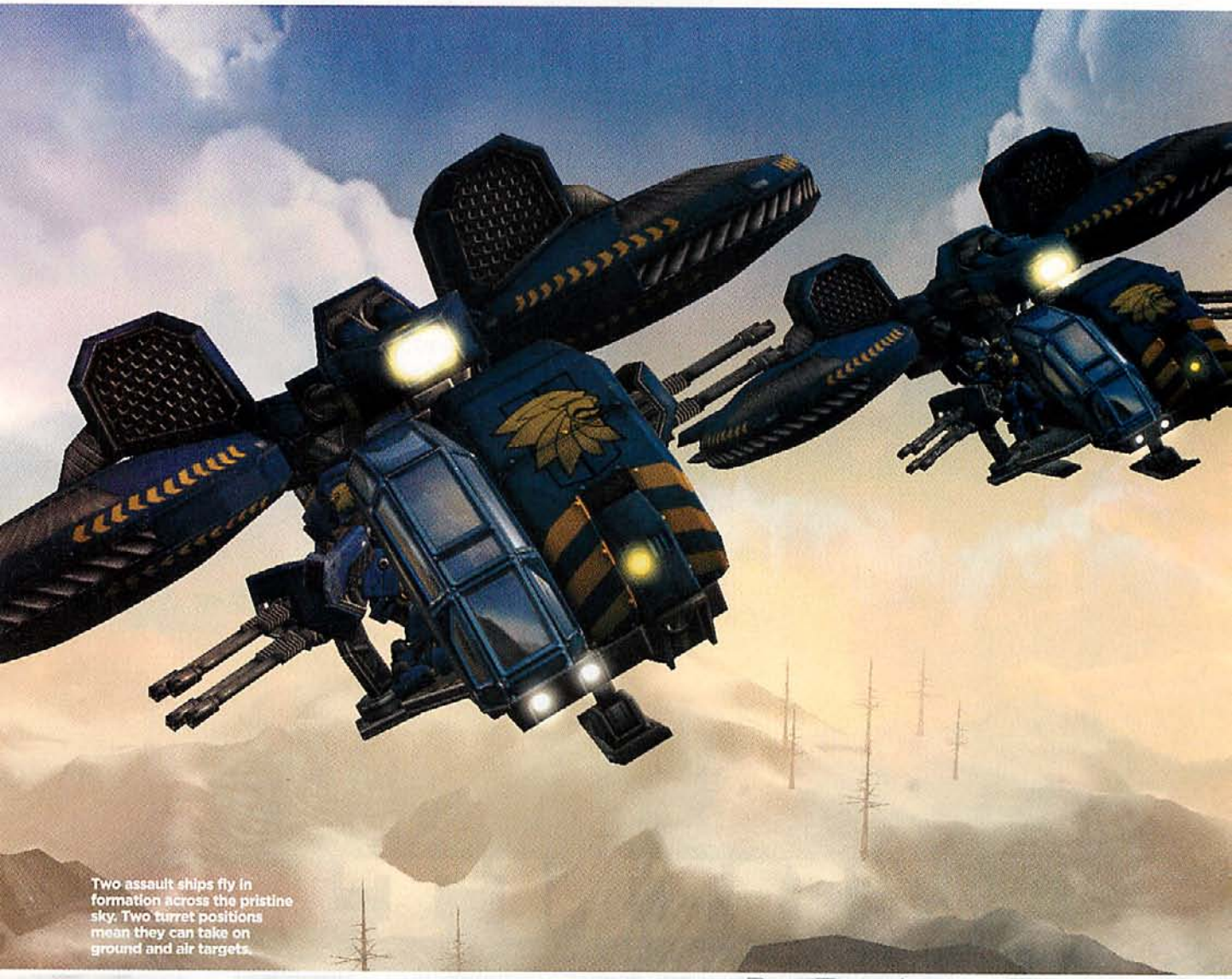
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Two assault ships fly in formation across the pristine sky. Two turret positions mean they can take on ground and air targets.



The new single-player mode offers noobs a chance to rocket into *Tribes*.



Staring down a Henry.

Inside


48

S.T.A.L.K.E.R.
This "nuclear" FPS hailing from Mother Russia boasts innovative A.I.


52

Kohan
A sequel with a new 3D engine and design focused on strategy, not micromanagement.


50

Leisure Suit Larry
The Suit is back for another generation, and he's randier than ever.

PUBLISHER: **Vivendi Universal** DEVELOPER: **Irrational Games** GENRE: **FPS** RELEASE DATE: **September 2004**

Tribes: Vengeance

Tribes hard with a vengeance

Fans of the *Tribes* series have long been a tightly banded tribe themselves. Part of the appeal was the hazing ritual—the learning curve that bonds players of multiplayer games.

So, how to ensnare new players in the web of *Tribes*' charms? Simple: Reinvent, revamp, renew, and renovate. And much of that begins and ends with a brand-new developer: Irrational Games, the brain trust behind *Freedom Force*.

Tragic kingdom

The biggest difference between *Tribes: Vengeance* and the previous two *Tribes* games is an actual single-player game that's set at a time when the powerful Empire is holding tight to its reigns. A complex cast of characters tells a story of political dissent, manipulation, and old-fashioned killing. The main heroine is Julia, a headstrong princess with her eyes set not on the throne but rather squarely on her gladiatorial sport—so squarely that she's swapped said eyes for cutting-edge, yellow artificial optics.

The single-player action should help newbies get a feel for every aspect of the game without having to go through the unforgiving experience that diving into a full-on multiplayer skirmish might provide. That's fully in line with the "easy to learn, hard to master" design philosophy that senior designer Michael Johnston espouses. "Previously, the slower speeds of *Tribes* made it hard to feel empowered," he says. As such, movement rate has been ramped up, and details like air control have been tightened. During our exclusive hands-on playing session, we were impressed with the game's new speed.

"Guns. Lots of guns."

Guns do not have direct secondary fire, but a clever player can learn little tricks that enable secondary benefits. For example, the buckler not only serves as a shield, but can also be used specifically to knock back heavily armored foes.

Some of the primary weapons include the napalm gun and the Frisbee-o'-death disc that boomerangs back to you. *Vengeance* also simplifies the superfluous variety of grenades featured in *Tribes 2* by offering only a single type: one worth using.

The new grappling hook latches on to nearly any surface to let you swing like a monkey. Think "elastical swinging," not the classic *Quake* "grapple" that lets you turbo down corridors. *Tribes*' new grappling hook even lets you grab enemies, slowing 'em down while causing some damage. One technique to master is to grapple the ground near a flag, nab the flag, and rubber-band-snap yourself for a hasty trip back to home base.

"Easy to learn, hard to master"—a design philosophy focused on the freedom of movement.

Each of the weapons is being carefully balanced. For example, the rocket pods shoot out a spiraling series of missiles that corkscrew away into the distance, but the missiles are nicely spaced apart. Vehicles are getting similar balancing attention: The pod, a one-man deployable hovercraft, moves much slower now, which, Irrational hopes, will mean fewer games of chicken as players ram vehicles into one another.

You can still choose between three different types of armor/classes from the outset: heavy, medium, and light. Plus, there will be dispatchable packs that create additional job roles. For example, a repair pack essentially turns you into a medic.

Tribal warfare

Single player is all well and good, but *Tribes* made its rep on the multiplayer battleground. The multiplayer map Utopia has the feel of the postapocalyptic movie *Akira*. There's a constant sense of paranoia as you run through war-torn urban streets. Enemies seem to be everywhere, hiding out in crumbling buildings or sniping from the rooftops.

Another multiplayer map took us inside the Empire palace, a place dripping with golden tapestries and walls of windows. On one side of the estate, the Phoenix tribe has crashed through, leaving a spaceship and a gaping hole in the sunlit ceiling. Visible through the sweeping windows: Empire tribesman jetting over for the kill.

Johnny Liu



Stroll down the yellow-brick road of the Children of the Phoenix.

The Word: ROCKING IT



This is a S.T.A.L.K.E.R. What does that mean? It's revealed in the story.



Check out the detail on this sniper. Even the squishy foam eyepiece is there!



Mutants and
stalkers won'
wait around fo
to show





Good doggie.
doggie. Hor
mutated, cre
dogg

PUBLISHER: THQ DEVELOPER: GSC Game World GENRE: FPS RELEASE DATE: Q4 2004

S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl

Sneaking up on some bigger-name games

Excellent vodka and hearty cabbage soup aren't the only things "under development" in Kiev, Ukraine. Ukrainian-based developer GSC Game World is cooking up a game so unique, it could give the likes of *Doom 3* and *Half-Life 2* a run for their money.



Nukes in Chernobyl (again)

Set in the near future, *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* takes place at the site of one of the world's worst nuclear power plant accidents: Chernobyl. A second explosion at the Chernobyl plant occurs, and in the aftermath, a black market centered on radioactive artifacts from the explosion springs up. These pieces of rubble hold a mysterious power, and...well, let's just say that a lot of people want to get their hands on these things.

You play the role of a freelance mercenary, a S.T.A.L.K.E.R., working to collect artifacts for the highest bidder. Ah, but it ain't so easy. Bloodthirsty mutants roam around the plant. Hidden radioactive anomalies litter the landscape. Plenty of other scavengers are also competing with you.

S.T.A.L.K.E.R. takes the genre in an entirely new direction by building an independently living world around the player. There are a few event-based scripts that advance the plot, but GSC has taken a bold step by giving all the NPCs their own dynamic A.I. Mutants and other S.T.A.L.K.E.R.s have to meet their own needs for food, sleep, and survival, essentially carrying out their own agenda in real time as you play through the game yourself. The crew at GSC even concedes that an NPC S.T.A.L.K.E.R could affect the course of the game by completing a major objective ahead of the player.

GSC also promises a good number of truly unique endings; which one you see depends on the course you take. You could play the game with guns blazing at anyone who gets in your way, or you could try a less-aggressive path. Obviously, one of the benefits of such an open-ended game engine is the replayability of the single-player game. You'll be able to align yourself with a completely different group the next time through for a fresh experience.

S.T.A.L.K.E.R. also has some character-management elements, but it's far from being an RPG. In addition to the usual health level, you'll have to monitor radiation exposure, sleep, and hunger, all of which play a part in character management. You must also manage your limited carrying load; your backpack has only so much space, and you have only so much endurance. To help you carry the heavy stuff, you'll be able to purchase a few different cars and trucks, but no brute vehicles like tanks. Weapons range from the standard combat knife to a variety of pistols, like the Beretta 92FS, to assault rifles such as the Soviet standard AK-47 and modern M16 variants. Weapons can be outfitted with silencers, scopes, and even grenade launchers (for a price, natch) to make them even more deadly.

Extremely long sight lines make *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*'s outdoor views very realistic, and GSC's custom-built X-ray graphics engine can push a massive number of polygons, topping it off with some impressive lighting effects. Real-time weather and day-light to nighttime changes add to the atmosphere, but it isn't just window dressing. Example: Poor weather causes fatigue more easily and limits your view.

Stalk up the multiplayer

CGW was provided with an exclusive look at *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*'s multiplayer component, which is in the very early stages of development. Essentially, there will be three gameplay modes: deathmatch, team deathmatch, and another style currently called key mode, which will require teams to battle for possession of a key object.

The final number of players in multiplayer is also to be determined, but GSC is shooting for 18 players in deathmatch modes and five or six per team in key mode. We saw an impressive level contained in a large factory train yard. Among the other scenarios to be included, one takes place at a small military outpost, another is set inside a reactor.

Much of *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* remains under wraps. The good crew at GSC still won't tell us what "*S.T.A.L.K.E.R.*" stands for or what exactly the plot circumstances are, but no matter—*S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* stands on its own. *Half-Life 2* and *Doom 3* are getting a lot of buzz, and rightly so, but *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* is so unique it'll shake the whole FPS genre to the core when it reaches a PC near you.

John Marrin

An NPC S.T.A.L.K.E.R. could affect the course of the game by completing a major objective ahead of the player.

The Word NUCLEAR

PIPELINE

Ship dates and slip dates for games in the stream

Game	Developer	Expected
Advent Rising	Majesco Games	September 2004
Anarchy Online: Alien Invasion	Funcom	Q2 2004
Armies of Exigo	Electronic Arts	October 2004
Atlantis Evolution	The Adventure Company	November 2004
Aura: Fate of the Ages	The Adventure Company	June 2004
The Bard's Tale	inXile Entertainment	2004
Black & White II	Electronic Arts	October 2004
BloodRayne 2	Majesco Games	October 2004
Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth	Bethesda Softworks	August 2004
Catwoman	Electronic Arts	July 2004
Civilization IV	Atari	2005
Codename: Panzers	CDV Software	Q2 2004
Creature Conflict: The Clan Wars	Cenega Publishing	September 2004
Dark Fall II: Lights Out	The Adventure Company	2004
Doom 3	Activision	May 2004
Dragon Empires	Codemasters	Q3 2004
DRIV3R	Atari	June 2004
Dungeon Siege II	Microsoft	2004
EverQuest II	SOE	June 2004
Evil Genius	Vivendi Universal	September 2004
The Fall: Last Days of Gaia	TBA	2004
Flat-Out	Empire Interactive	Q3 2004
Freedom Force vs. the Third Reich	TBA	2004
Full Spectrum Warrior	THQ	September 2004
Ground Control 2: Operation Exodus	NDA Productions	June 2004
Guild Wars	NCsoft	2004
Half-Life 2	Vivendi Universal	Q3 2004
I of the Enemy	Enemy Technology	Q2 2004
Joint Operations: Typhoon Rising	NovaLogic	May 2004
Juiced	Acclaim	Q3 2004
Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude	Sierra	Q3 2004
LOTR: The Battle for Middle-earth	Electronic Arts	Q4 2004
Madden NFL 2005	Electronic Arts	Q3 2004
The Matrix Online	TBA	October 2004
Medal of Honor: Pacific Assault	Electronic Arts	June 2004
Men of Valor: Vietnam	Sierra	Q4 2004
Micro Mayhem	Jaleco	June 2004
Middle-Earth Online	Vivendi Universal	October 2004

New Update

PUBLISHER: **Sierra** DEVELOPER: **High Voltage Software** GENRE: **Adventure** RELEASE DATE: **Q4 2004**

Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude

Larry, Larry...Lovage?

Sierra is coming up...with a *Leisure Suit Larry* franchise. That's right, folks, the leisure suit is back for a new generation. Parents, take note: *Magna Cum Laude* isn't for kids—Sierra's aiming for a solid M rating, so expect healthy servings of the series' trademark sexual humor and double entendres. Female gamers: Prepare to be objectified and offended, but amused.

In this new entry to the classic PC series, namesake Larry Laffer has bequeathed the title role to Larry Lovage, his equally lecherous twenty-something nephew. The original Larry is still around to lay down playa lessons to his stalwart protégé.

Young Larry Lovage's latest scheme to win the panties...er, hearts...of females everywhere is to schmooze his way onto a reality dating show called *Swingles*. Unfortunately, the show's snooty hostess doesn't think Larry has the chutzpah. Determined to prove her wrong, our salacious hero sets off to win the affections and approval of several nubile co-eds.

Larry can do everything from dropping cringe-inducing one-liners ("Did it hurt when you fell from heaven?") to taking part in a variety of minigames and puzzles, most of which revolve around his girl-wooing shenanigans. Each of the lovelies is a play on some stereotype, from naïve farm girl Sally Mae Beauregard to foul-mouthed Italian gangster Analisa Gambozinni. One we found particularly amusing was Harriet Funderbunk, overzealous pep squad girl. Don't be fooled by her "band camp" appearance; she's actually quite naughty.

Worming your way into these ladies' bedrooms isn't always easy. Instead of the classic "choose-a-line" from old adventure games, conversations work on a more active system. You control a fast-moving icon that zips along a track of conversation icons; among the icons are "right" and "wrong" things to say, as well as lewd comments and "bodily function" sounds. A heart meter indicates a girl's interest level.



I sure wish I could get chicks like this one. Except, you know, real.

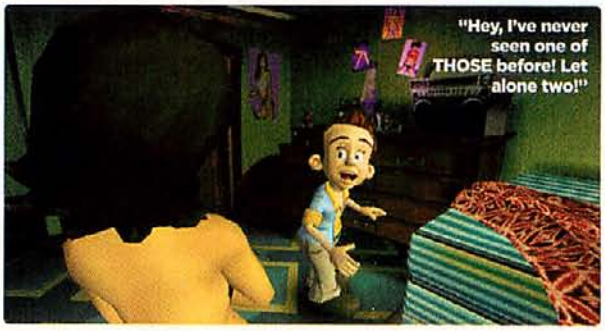
To close the deal on any one of the principal "goal girls," you'll have to make your way through three conversations and various minigame challenges, such as mixing drinks, dancing, and the classic game of Quarters. Complete all these objectives and you'll witness Larry's night of love, plus score a "token of affection," proving your playa skillz to the *Swingles* hostess.

Miscellaneous minigames include photography, paper delivery, and serving drinks at Spartacus, the local gay bar. With the money Larry earns, he can buy new outfits, bribe people, or shop at any of various Vendmaster 2000 machines.

If there's one thing *Magna Cum Laude* looks to have in spades, it's humor. Hilarious dialogue, amusing characters, sophomoric word plays, and even a few classic *Larry* homages (look for the Lefty's Too bar on the seedy side of town) should provide plenty of gut-busting *American Pie*-esque humor. All that's missing is beloved series creator Al Lowe, whose involvement is yet to be determined.

Whatever the case, we're glad to see you again, Larry—welcome back. **Ryan Scott**

The Word: Raunchy





PUBLISHER: **Codemasters** DEVELOPER: **Codemasters** GENRE: **MMORPG** RELEASE DATE: **Fall 2004**

Dragon Empires

Hear them roar

Dragons are now the hot new thing (groan) in the MMO business. It seems as if every upcoming MMO lets you play as a dragon, contains the word "Dragon" in its title, or somehow features dragons in a prominent role. Add one more name to the dragon list: Codemasters' upcoming massively multiplayer RPG, *Dragon Empires*.



A brisk outdoor stroll is a good way to get those 10 minutes of cardio.

In *Dragon Empires*, you'll choose from among three races—magic-inclined humans, warlike dragonbloods, or roguish shadows—and 15 archetypal character classes in pursuit of adventure with your fellow players. In addition to all the ubiquitous fantasy trappings, quests, and crafting options, *Dragon Empires* will place a heavy focus on PVP combat, giving player-made clans the opportunity to rule cities and bend local economies to their every whim. The dragons mentioned in the game's title act as high-level marshals for the various empires throughout the world—hence, *Dragon Empires*.

Fantasy author Piers Anthony is on board to assist in crafting the game world's history and background fiction, lending a literary flourish to the title. Look for *Dragon Empires* to hit shelves later this year. **RS**

The Word: DRAGGIN'

PUBLISHER: **Hip Games** DEVELOPER: **Bitmap Brothers, Namco** GENRE: **Action** RELEASE DATE: **Spring 2004**

kill.switch

Turn on a war

Take cover! No, seriously, I mean it—cover is a good thing. It's been part of game design ever since Namco's *Pac-Man*. Some places are safe. Others aren't. Namco has developed a whole new way to "take cover" in *kill.switch*, a port of the company's war-torn console action game.



A broken-down truck. Stone rubble. Ducking behind these objects and letting them be blown up—instead of you—is the only way to stay alive. As Bishop, a soldier thrown into the conflict, you must constantly find new cover to make your way past the heavily armed opposition.

For those of you having violent flashbacks of Namco's other recent console port, *Dead to Rights*, rest assured—*kill.switch* is a much better game right off the bat. While this port won't have any extras, it does have full keyboard/mouse support and, hopefully, a minimum of bugs. *Kill.switch* should be on store shelves by the time you read this. **Johnny Liu**

The Word: COVER BAND

PIPELINE

Game	Developer	Expected
The Movies	Activision	October 2004
Mythica	Microsoft	CANCELED
Operation Flashpoint 2	Codemasters	Q4 2004
Pac-Man World 2	Hip Interactive	May 2004
Playboy: The Mansion	Arush Entertainment	2004
Priest	JC Entertainment	2004
Prince of Persia 2 (working title)	Ubisoft	2004
Project Jane-J	The Adventure Company	Q4 2004
Psychotoxic	CDV Software	2004
Quake IV	Activision	2004
RollerCoaster Tycoon 3	Atari	Q4 2004
Rome: Total War	Activision	Q3 2004
Sam & Max: Freelance Police	LucasArts	CANCELED
Shade: Wrath of Angels	Conoga	2004
ShellShock: Nam '67	Eidos Interactive	June 2004
Sid Meier's Pirates!	Atari	2004
Silent Hunter III	Ubisoft	2004
Silent Storm: Sentinels	Encore Software	2004
The Sims 2	Electronic Arts	Q3 2004
Soldiers: Heroes of World War II	Codemasters	Q2 2004
S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl	THQ	September 2004
Star Wars Battlefront	LucasArts	Q3 2004
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic—The Sith Lords	LucasArts	2004
Star Wars Republic Commando	LucasArts	Q3 2004
State of Emergency 2	TBA	Q4 2004
Supremacy: Four Paths to Power	Strategy First	Q2 2004
Supreme Ruler 2010	Strategy First	Q2 2004
SWAT: Urban Justice	Sierra	2004
Team Fortress 2: Brotherhood of Arms	Sierra	December 2004
Thief: Deadly Shadows	Eidos Interactive	Q2 2004
ToCA Race Driver 2	Codemasters	Q2 2004
Train Simulator 2	Microsoft	July 2004
Tribes: Vengeance	Sierra	Q4 2004
True Crime: Streets of L.A.	Activision	May 2004
UEFA Euro 2004	Electronic Arts	Q2 2004
Ultima X: Odyssey	Electronic Arts	September 2004
Vampire: The Masquerade—Bloodlines	Activision	November 2004
Warhammer 40,000: Dawn of War	THQ	Q4 2004
Warlords Battlecry III	Enlight Software	Q2 2004
Wartime Command: Battle for Europe 1939-1945	Codemasters	Q3 2004
World of WarCraft	Blizzard Entertainment	2004
Ys VI: The Ark of Napishtim	Konami	Q4 2004
Zoo Tycoon 2	Microsoft	Q4 2004

New Update

PUBLISHER: **Majesco** DEVELOPER: **Terminal Reality** GENRE: **Third-person sucker** RELEASE DATE: **October 2004**

BloodRayne 2

Gaming's Goth girl is back and bloody promising

Rayne is a little misunderstood. Yeah, she drinks blood and carries blades on her arms, but she's also part of a secret society out to save the world. In this supernatural sequel, Rayne fights off waves of creatures and still deals with all the design problems from the original game.

Seeing red

Majesco product manager Liz Buckley concedes that the original game was disjointed and more than a little unpolished. "But," Buckley says, "we're looking to address these points—and more—in the sequel." After seeing *BloodRayne 2* in action, we tend to think they've succeeded.

Instead of busting Nazis in the 1940s, you'll fight modern-day enemies. The plot is ripped straight from the original *Blade* movie: You must stop the imminent vampire apocalypse. The story spans 10 huge acts that'll have you wasting punks and creatures as you try to stop your father, the nefarious mastermind behind a scheme to blot out the sun, leaving the planet ripe for harvesting fresh blood. With a solid story set in place, the developers can focus on the important part: tweaking the experience.

This time, they introduced a wider selection of moves in a variety of combinations. How much experience you earn depends on how you fight, and gaining experience unlocks new moves. There are even plans to include 12 additional killing blows and special kill cams.

Princess of Persia

"We actually learned a lot from *Prince of Persia*," says Buckley. What we've seen includes running along walls, catlike climbing, swinging, and perching on poles. The developers are even trying to incorporate more puzzle elements, but this time around, they are decidedly more bloody. To wit: To make it past the huge blades of a ventilation-shaft fan, you use your chain whip to yank enemies into the fan. We fear most of these puzzles are of the yanking-corpses-into-various-objects ilk, but at least the whip maneuver adds variety. **Darren Gladstone**

The Word: **BLOOD LUST**





BloodRayne has to deal with her villainous dad *and* her wicked siblings.

PUBLISHER: **Gathering, Take-Two** DEVELOPER: **TimeGate Studios** GENRE: **RTS** RELEASE DATE: **Q3 2004**

Kohan: Kings of War

Down with management

***Kohan: Kings of War*, the sequel to TimeGate Studios' *Kohan: Immortal Sovereign*, seeks to alleviate RTS micromanagement woes with a focus on strategy instead of clicking. Adel Chaveleh, the president of TimeGate, compares the new *Kohan* to an onion: "Look past [the outside] and you can begin to understand the details and the depth."**

You don't have to look far to see *Kohan: Kings of War* has already taken a visual leap forward, shifting past its predecessor's dated 2D sprites. The third dimension and new game-engine cinematics add a fuller sense of the world.

Companies are formed by joining hero captains with frontline and support soldiers; as long as a single member of the group makes it out of a combat situation alive, the entire party can be revived. This design engenders empathy, as your infantry becomes more than just kindling for the fires of war. Heroes also gain experience, enabling different grouping strategies and progressing the story.



Move 'em on out.

Kings of War promises to continue the mythology of the first *Kohan*, while offering a longer story with more robust designs and characters. Six playable races populate the game, including the kohan, man, undead, haroun, and drauga.

Kingdom come

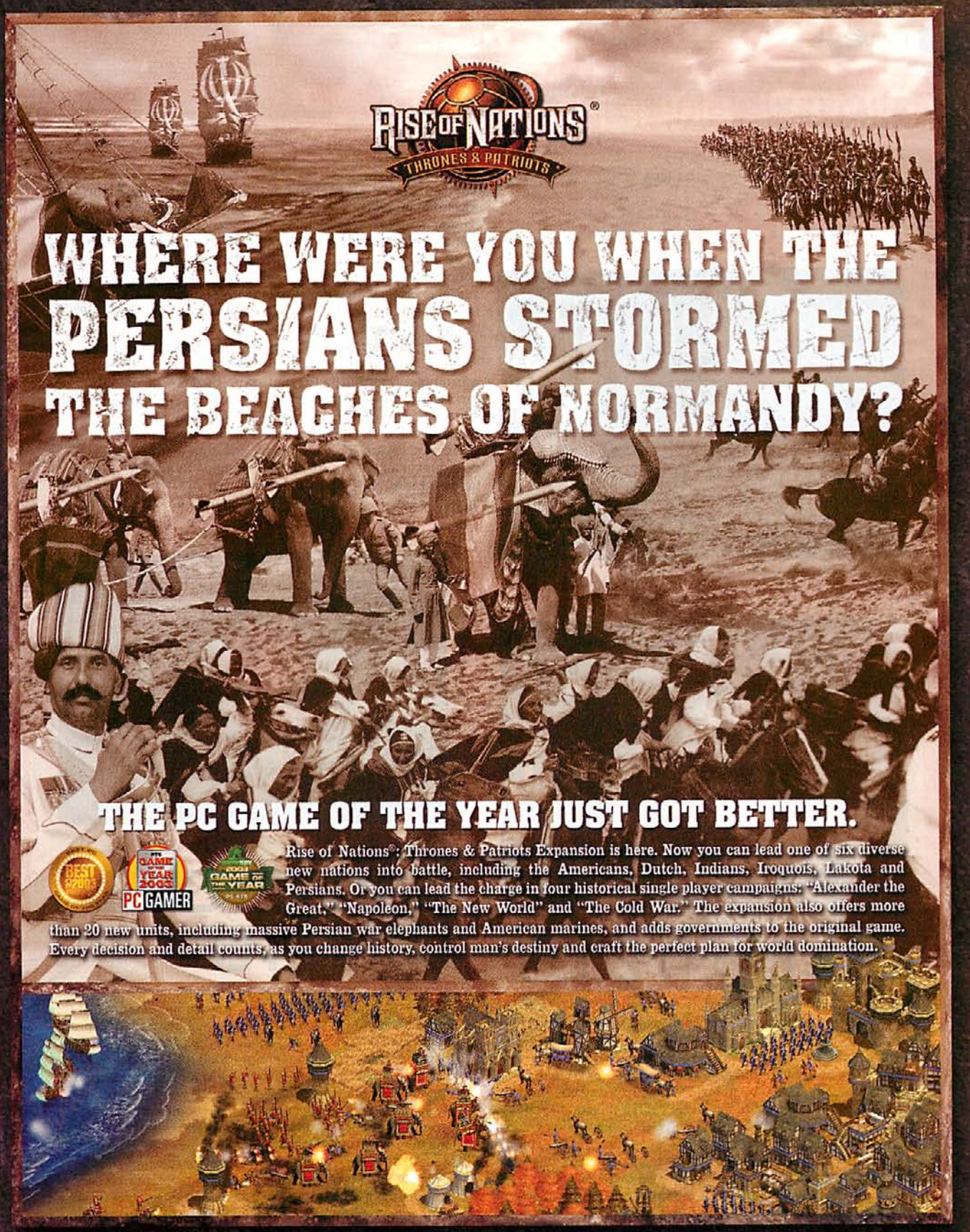
When starting a kingdom in the original *Kohan*, the components inside the castle walls were not visually depicted; instead, city additions were indicated by icons in the information bar. In *Kings of War*, a kingdom is still built from the outside in, but every addition now has a proper visual representation. And *Kings of War*'s map generator is built upon the strength of the original's, with a few tune-ups.

More polish, higher production values, and a few key additions, such as the composer behind *Neverwinter Nights*—empower *Kohan* to take on the bigger-name RTS titles. With aptly pilfered talent from the now-defunct Westwood Studios and the support of publishers Gathering and Take-Two, *Kohan: Kings of War* is arming itself for battle later this year. **Johnny Liu**



Five months into the wilderness, when Yohan realized he left the map at home.

The Word: **MANAGEABLE**



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DIGITAL UNDERGROUND The best games you've never seen

FROM: **Brat Designs** AVAILABILITY: **Q4 2004**

SOLAR



Word on the street: While "trendy" first-person shooters strive toward realism, *SOLAR* celebrates the universal passion for plugging undead supersoldiers. From the creator of *Breed* comes this ambitious sci-fi combat simulator with support for up to 32 players, bots included. Two factions slug it out in solo or cooperative and competitive multiplayer scenarios, using land, sea, and air units atop eminently destructible terrain. Our favorite feature: biological weapons, which let you spread disease like a senior on prom night.

Sounds kinda beat: Great—it's *Battlefield 2042*. We're sure Mom and Pop will love it. With *Halo* receiving such a lukewarm reception on the PC platform, it's uncertain whether the market can support the number of upcoming futuristic fracases currently in production. As of press time, the title's predecessor—set within the same genre—hasn't even shipped. Considering there's no hard data justifying a pseudosequel, even we egotistical types have to wonder if Brat's being a tad bit presumptuous.

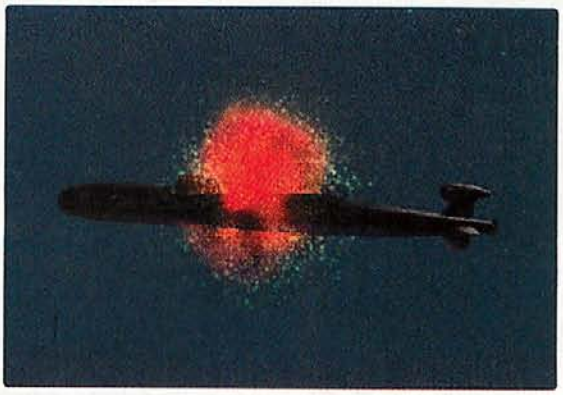


FROM: **Joylabs** AVAILABILITY: **Q4 2004**

Das Reich 2005

Word on the street: Nazis...we hate those guys! So does modern-day Germany, whose very own Joylabs is hammering away on a first-person blaster set in an alternate history in which Hitler triumphed. The dictator's descendants have established a totalitarian regime, subjugating all of Europe under one blood-soaked banner. Your goal in a 2005 (hopefully) very different from our own: Storm detailed environments powered by the acclaimed Codecreatures engine and bring it all crashing down.

Sounds kinda beat: Conceptually and technologically, this sucker's in good shape. Financially...well, take your best guess. The company's previous undertaking—the much-hyped but unreleased *Y-Project*—was the victim of corporate bankruptcy, leaving us dubious about *Das Reich*'s eventual fate. But if the moneymen can pull it together and see the effort through, all signs indicate that gamers will be better off for it. For safety's sake, we'll keep the beer and pretzels handy until further news breaks.



FROM: **Sonalysts** AVAILABILITY: **Q2 2004**

Dangerous Waters

Word on the street: A comprehensive, independently developed simulation that could be the biggest naval-recruitment tool since the Village People's last disco hit. Players are placed in command of seven vessels, including a frigate, patrol aircraft, helicopter, and both diesel and nuclear attack submarines. Extensive multiplayer support allows for collaborative and competitive action, with team-based scenarios also a given. Database contributions by the government account for unprecedented realism across the board, with 270 platforms and 17 navies represented.

Sounds kinda beat: With sales figures for this type of title dwindling in recent years, most sensible industry watchers suspect the market for it sunk deep into Davy Jones' locker long ago. Perhaps not, although it's doubtful *Dangerous Waters* will be the game that proves it. Ubisoft's recently announced *Silent Hunter III* should enjoy a larger marketing budget and, hence, a higher profile. Alternately, it might just tide seamen over until someone gets around to resurrecting *Harpoon 4*—again.

"IT PUSHES THE EDGE OF WHAT GAMES SHOULD LOOK LIKE."

–COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

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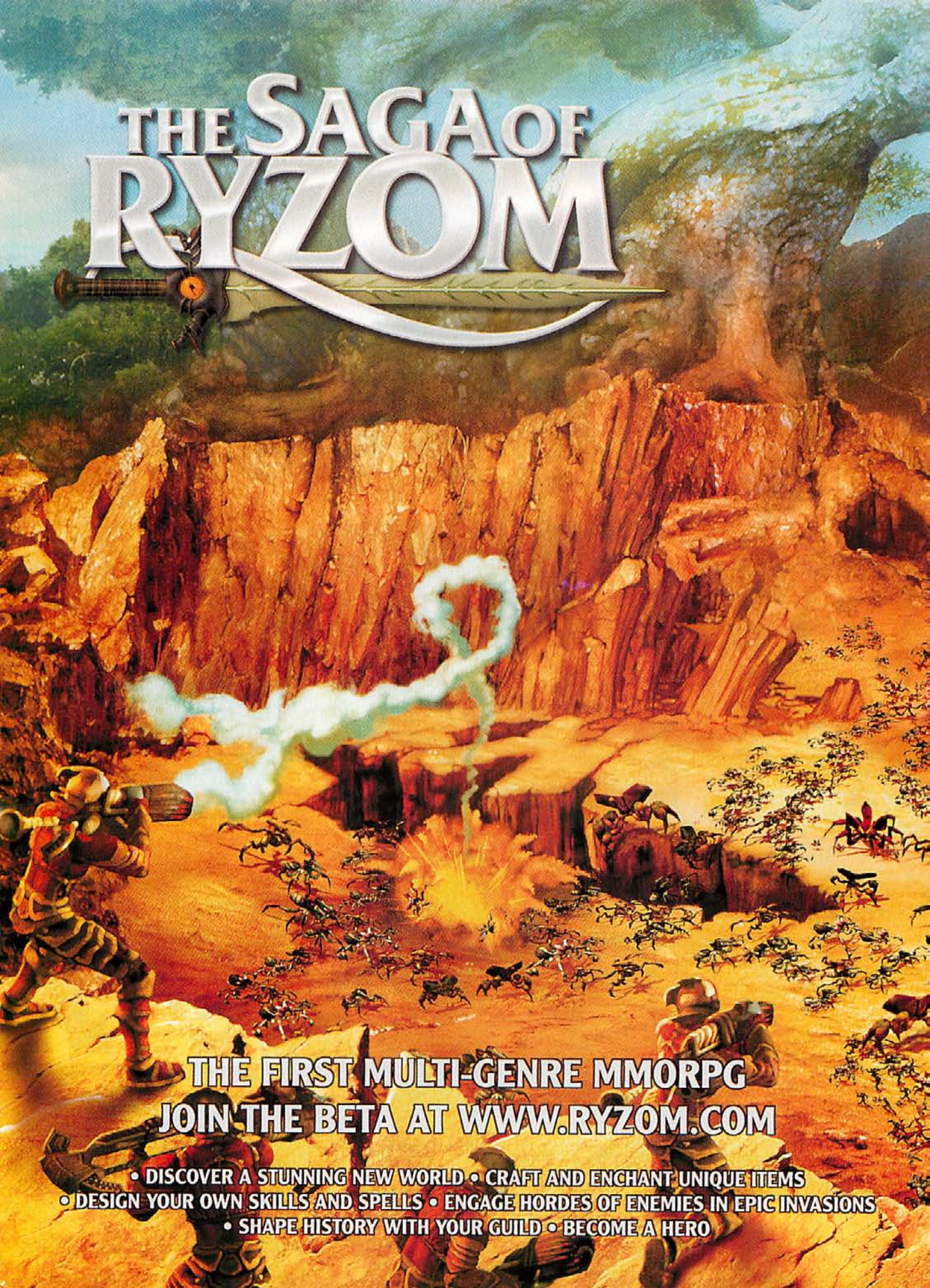
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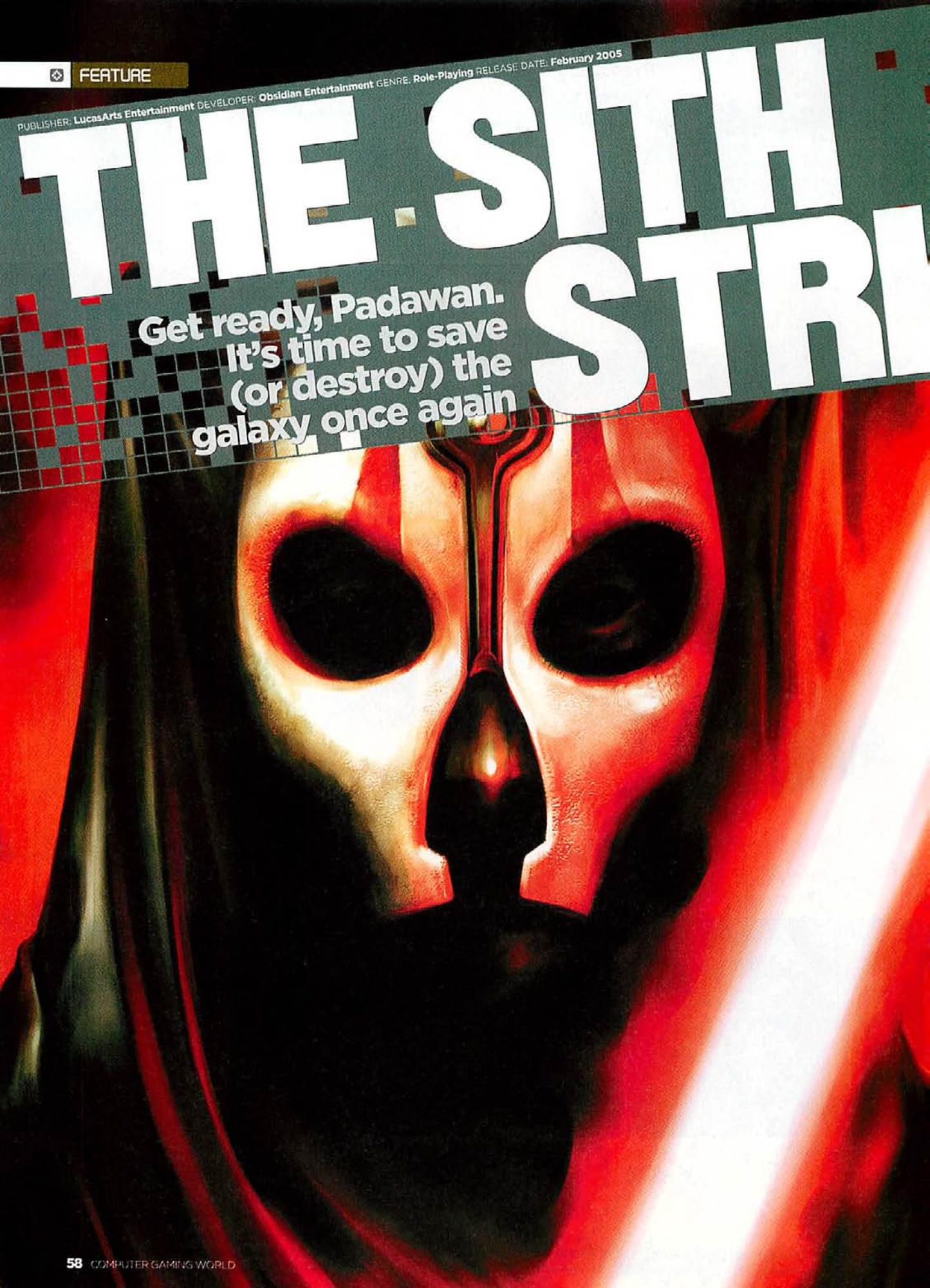
NEVRAX

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PUBLISHER: **LucasArts Entertainment** DEVELOPER: **Obsidian Entertainment** GENRE: **Role-Playing** RELEASE DATE: **February 2005**

THE SITH STRI

Get ready, Padawan. It's time to save (or destroy) the galaxy once again



By Jeff Green

KE BACK!



Can't get enough *KOTOR?* Yeah, neither can we. So be like us: Pick up the June issue of *Electronic Gaming Monthly* for more exclusive info and screens, including details on the Xbox version, and a super-cool poster we were too lame and cheap to include here.



Mining droids converge on the player's party.

How great was *Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic*? So great that the normally divided gaming press (including *CGW*) was virtually unanimous in crowning it 2003's game of the year. So great that gamers who had no interest in either *Star Wars* or role-playing games found themselves sucked in just as much as the fanatics. So great that the fanatics themselves, conditioned to dull their expectations after a series of so-so games and two painfully disappointing movies, could breathe a sigh of relief and praise the heavens that finally, someone got it. Someone remembered why we fell in love with *Star Wars* in the first place and applied all their creative energy to channeling that experience into a videogame.

Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic: The Sith Lords—the long-winded official name of the sequel—promises to be more of the same, with many of the same characters, game dynamics, and story elements, as well as a totally new experience, with all-new Force powers, character classes, and interface enhancements. A continuation of the awesome story line established in the first game, it takes the series in a different, stronger, perhaps darker new direction—kind of like *The Empire Strikes Back* did all those years ago.

We traveled to Irvine, CA, for an exclusive first look at *The Sith Lords* with developers Obsidian Entertainment, and though the game is not due to ship until February 2005, it's still well in progress, with the story fully plotted, characters taking shape, and many of the levels and quests already



Yeah, that's right, the droids have flamethrowers, too. Burn, baby.





Lightsabers will be more customizable this time around. And prettier!



Taking a late-night stroll on a mysterious planet.



Forget your character from the first game—you'll be creating an all-new character in *KOTOR: The Sith Lords*.

mapped out. Forget *Episode III* (if you haven't already)—this is the *Star Wars* experience you're looking for.

Fear not, Padawan

Your first question may well be: Who is Obsidian Entertainment? Those who pay attention to such things know that the first *Knights of the Old Republic* was developed by BioWare, the Canadian geniuses also behind the brilliant *Baldur's Gate* and *Neverwinter Nights* RPGs. But with BioWare busy working on its new Xbox title, *Jade Empire*, the company isn't available to handle the chores of *KOTOR's* sequel. BioWare recommended a group of guys it knows well—and you do, too, albeit perhaps not by name, but rather through their amazing games.

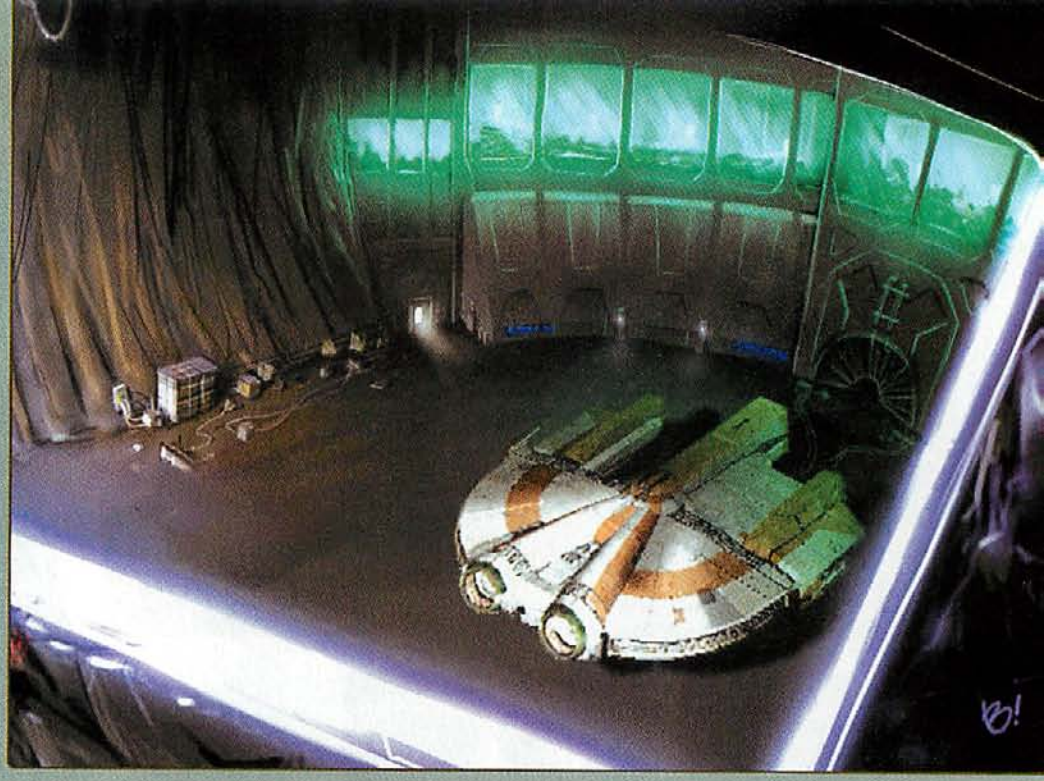
Obsidian Entertainment is a new company founded by the main überbrains of Interplay's legendary Black Isle Studios, who—both with BioWare and on their own—were responsible for some of the best RPGs of the past decade, including *Fallout 1* and *2*, *Icewind Dale 1 and 2*, and *Planescape: Torment*. So put aside any fears you may have that *The Sith Lords* is being given to a "B team"—these guys know RPGs as well as anyone in the business. OK? Now let's talk about the game.

War all the time

The Sith Lords takes place five years after the end of *Knights of the Old Republic*. Forget your character from the first game—you'll be creating an all-new character in this game. Why? Lead designer Chris Avellone explains: "I didn't want to stomp all over anyone's decisions from the first game, because I think whatever resolutions you chose in that game should factor into this one." In other words, to have continued the story with that same character in the lead role would have forced Obsidian to assume a specific ending for the first *KOTOR*—and it may not have been the ending you chose. (Because the original *KOTOR* has such a major plot twist, we are steadfastly avoiding spoilers here.)

Instead, the story picks up five years later, and you are an entirely new character: a disgraced veteran of the Mandalorian War, a Jedi exiled from the Jedi Order, just now returning to Republic space after years away. You return to find the Republic in chaos, on the verge of collapse, the Jedi Academy on Dantooine destroyed, and the Jedi Order itself disbanded and scattered—all fallout from the brutal war with Malak and Revan. And now, as you're the last known Jedi around, Sith assassins are trying to hunt you down and wipe out the Jedi once and for all.

And what about Revan? All we know is that within a year



KOTOR: THE SITH LORDS
THE SHORT-ATTENTION-SPAN VERSION

When's it coming out? February 2005.
Will the Xbox version come out first? No—it's a simultaneous launch with the PC version.
Can I import my original *KOTOR* character? No.
Why not? It's a brand-new story, set five years after the first game.
So where's Revan? We don't know, but he's coming back.
But am I a Jedi again? Duh.
Is HK-47 coming back? Yes.
Why isn't BioWare doing this game? Because it's busy with *Jade Empire*.
Who is Obsidian? Refugees from Black Isle Studios, makers of many classic RPGs.
Will this game suck? We sure hope not.

after the events of the first game. Revan went off to the Unknown Regions and hasn't been heard from since. Whether he was redeemed or fell to the dark side—well, that's largely up to you.

"How we try to set it up early in the game," says Avellone, "is that during various conversations, players will tell the game what they believe the ending of the first game was, and that will affect decisions throughout our game." And though Obsidian wants to keep it a secret just how much of a role Revan plays in *The Sith Lords*, we've been promised that he's definitely coming back.

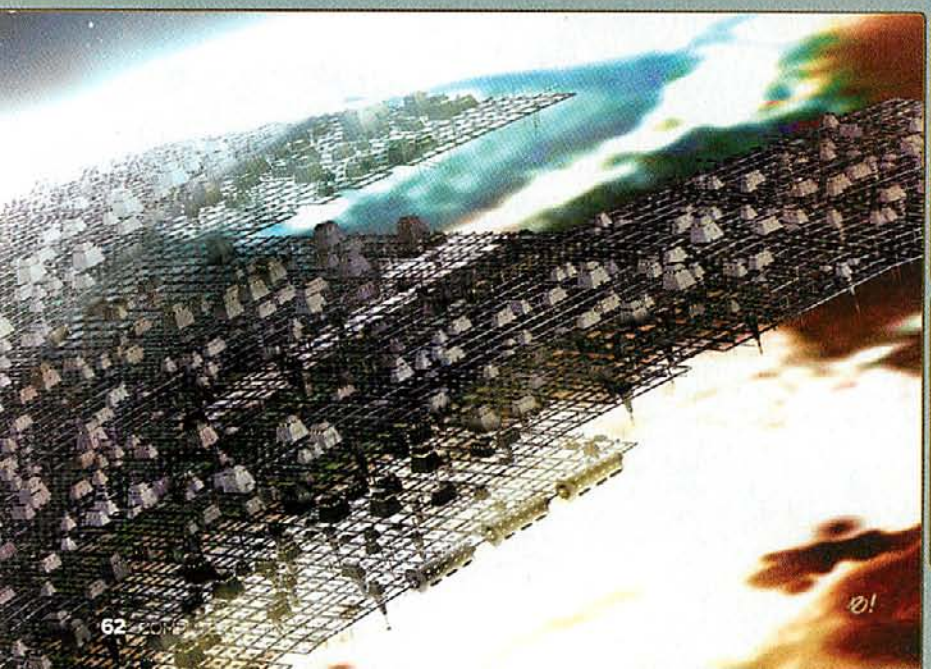
Dude, where's my lightsaber?

Although you do start the game as a Jedi, don't be fooled into thinking you come out of the gate in *The Sith Lords* as a lightsaber-swinging badass. You don't. In fact, you begin the game with neither a lightsaber nor Force powers, because as an exiled Jedi, your lightsaber was taken away and your connection to the Force lost—a convenient plot device to ensure you're not too powerful too early on.

Recovering your lightsaber—and learning how you lost it in the first place—is one of the game's major quests.

Recovering your lightsaber—and learning how you lost it in the first place—is, in fact, one of the game's major quests. One of the first new characters you meet, a mysterious Jedi named Kreia, will teach you how to hear the Force and use it again, and will be among the many new companions who assist you in your quest to get your lightsaber back.

Though you start out weak (in fact, just to rub it in, Obsidian has your character roaming the entire first area of the game clad in just underwear), as you level up and recover your Jedi abilities, you actually attain much stronger powers than you could in the first *KOTOR*. For *The Sith Lords*, Obsidian has created six new "prestige" classes for you to choose from—three each for dark-









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PC CD-ROM SOFTWARE

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Using a power attack against a mining droid.

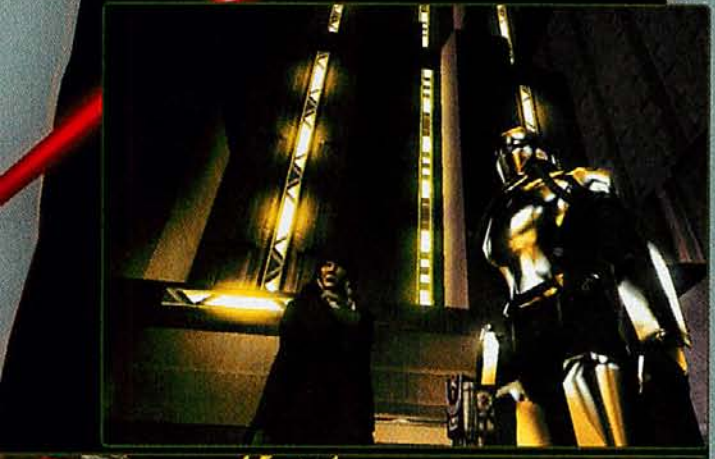
side and light-side characters—that essentially let you attain the status of the highest level Jedi or Sith you can imagine (see sidebar on page 66 for details).

Your lightsaber will also be more upgradeable, and you'll gain a host of new dark- and light-side Force powers. Though most of these are still to come, one we did see in action was Force sight, which lets you see through doors and walls to glimpse upcoming enemies and prepare yourself for battle. Force sight will also reveal a character's light- or dark-side "taint"—red for dark-side characters, blue for light-side ones. Other new Force powers mentioned include battle meditation (Bastila's special power in the first game) and Force rage, a dark-side power that will let you dish out huge amounts of damage.

Friends forever

If you played the original *KOTOR*, you know that it's not all about you. As it did in the *Baldur's Gate* games, BioWare created a host of memorable NPC companions in *Knights of the Old Republic*, complete with deep backstories, engaging personalities, and a variety of skills—you know, kind of like the great characters in those old *Star Wars* movies.

For the sequel, Obsidian is bringing back many of the NPCs, some to be your companions again and some just to show up in cameo roles. T3-M4, the utility droid with the awesome hacking skills, is the first old friend you encounter, as he takes you through the *Sith Lords'* first level, a tutorial designed to get the *Ebon Hawk*, your spacecraft from the first game, up and running again. (How exactly it is that your new character has acquired the *Ebon Hawk* is another mystery the designers are keeping close to







The central control area from the first planet of *KOTOR : The Sith Lords*.


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NEW PRESTIGE CLASSES

You start *KOTOR: The Sith Lords* as a Jedi, with the same choice of Jedi classes you eventually gained in the first game: consular, guardian, or sentinel. The new game, however, introduces all-new "prestige" classes for high-level characters: three each for the dark side and light side. Here's the breakdown.

LIGHT SIDE



Jedi Master: A counterpart to Sith Lord. Can "inspire companions and followers, recover lost Force points faster than other characters." Think: Yoda.



Jedi Watchman: A guardian supreme, with excellent lightsaber abilities and power and command over the Force. Think: Obi-Wan Kenobi.



Jedi Weapon Master: A fighting machine with increased powers of lightsaber deflection, resistance to pain, and the ability to do more damage in combat. Think: Mace Windu.

DARK SIDE



Sith Lord: An uber-badass with the ability to "demoralize opponents and corrupt the will of their followers." Think: Emperor Palpatine.



Sith Marauder: Like the ultimate Sith warrior, he can use dark Force rages, master many weapon disciplines, and shrug off pain. Think: Darth Maul.



Sith Assassin: An expert at stealth and deception, as well as a master of Force camouflage and a variety of stealth skills. Think: Mara Jade.



While the Ebon Hawk is parked, we take a whiz behind the tree, unobserved.

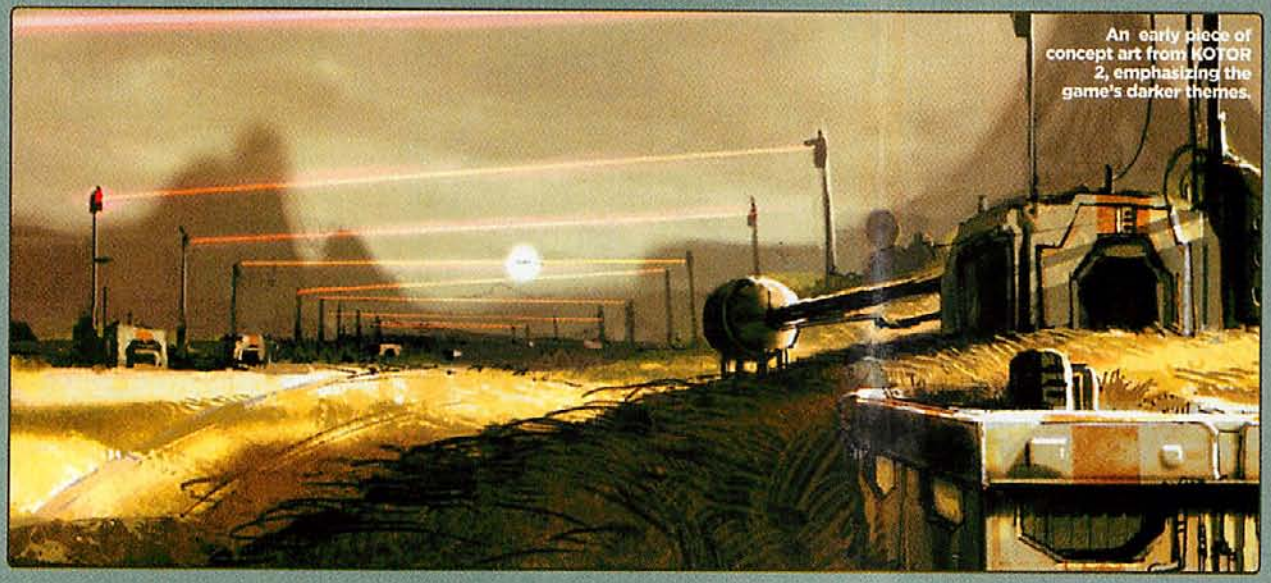
the vest right now.) We were assured that our favorite NPC, the trash-talking HK-47, is also returning in the new game, though how big a role he'll have is something else the meatbags at Obsidian declined to tell us.

All in all, you'll have 10 characters to choose from to fill out your party, which, as in the first game, will be limited to a maximum of three. Players who pursue the dark side may get different companions than light-side players, and in some cases, even your character's gender will determine which companions you get.

One of the big goals this time around is to have all of the companions be more useful and desirable, so you'll be more inclined to play them all. "Coming off *KOTOR 1*, one of the things we realized was that we had all these really cool characters, but some of them were underutilized," says Mike Gallo, the game's producer at LucasArts. "It's possible that some players may not have ever talked to Canderous or even met HK-47." The reason? Once many players get the Jedi, they never put anyone else in their party.

"Once you got the Jedi like Bastila, Juhani, and Jolee," Avellone confirms, "those guys are so powerful compared to the others, like Zaalbar and Canderous, there was often no incentive to use anyone else."

To fix this in *The Sith Lords*, Obsidian made a couple key design decisions. The first was to give every companion a powerful special ability so that in some cases, non-Jedi will prove more valuable to have in your party than Jedi. For example, a roguish Han Solo type named Atton Rand, who you meet in the game's first main area—Peragus, a mining facility in an asteroid field—will have the ability to never be completely knocked out, thus sparing you the Game Over screen you might get even with the most powerful Jedi in tow.



An early piece of concept art from KOTOR 2, emphasizing the game's darker themes.



The second decision was to physically split up the party more so that different characters will assume major roles at different points in the game. "We thought this was a very *Star Wars* thing to do," says Avellone. "In the *Star Wars* movies, the friends all split up and do various things, so it made sense for us to do it here. We wanted to have more moments where each character could shine for a while and get more stage time to show off their special abilities and give you more insight into their character."

As you explore the game's worlds (five in all, with numerous levels on each), many of the subquests will feature specific companions, who, for that portion of the game, assume a "starring" role as they split off from your main character. "The cool thing," says Avellone, "is that sometimes the companions will discover things the player's main character doesn't yet know—and they'll keep that information for a long time. They'll gain insights into what's happening in other parts of the game that you can't necessarily act on at first."

Finally, companions are being made more dynamic by reacting more to the decisions you make throughout the game. Says Chris Parker, Obsidian's chief development officer and producer, "One of the things we thought would be really neat is the ability to influence how your companions are affected by the light and dark side as well." How you treat your companions and the decisions you make may affect their decision making. "Some companions basically idolize you," says Parker, "so if you start falling to the dark side, they'll start falling, too—but if they don't like you, then the opposite may happen."

Face-lifts and tummy tucks

We're a couple thousand words into this story now, and we haven't yet told you about the all-new graphics engine, combat system, and interface. That's because they don't exist, nor will they. Obsidian is following the "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" line of reasoning, which in this case is a good call, since *KOTOR* was almost flawlessly executed by BioWare. Rather, Obsidian will just tweak things here and there to make the game a bit more polished.

Graphicswise, players can expect to see more interesting lighting and weather effects and many more—and more varied—attack animations. Now, rather than just seeing the same animations for certain attacks over and over, Obsidian is working on visually representing your upward progression—as you level up and your powers and feats get stronger, you'll see the animations for those attacks change, becoming cooler and more sophisticated.

Obsidian is also nipping and tucking the game's interface. One key change is the addition of a Quick button on the Action menu to instantly switch weapon configurations, rather than having to laboriously pause combat and go through the Equip screen. The designers hope this will encourage players to try different weapons and styles of attack. Other small tweaks include moving all the messages you receive to the Journal page, giving party selection its own screen, and fading out the user interface on the main game screen when you're not in combat so that you get a less-cluttered, more "full-screen" presentation while exploring the world.

LucasArts promises a joint Xbox and PC release this time, in February 2005.

All in all, however, don't expect a very different looking game. "Technically, this is the same game," admits Parker. "Our focus is more content driven than technology driven. *KOTOR* has a solid engine that works, so we just want to take advantage of that as much as possible and push it hard."



Countdown to February

Obsidian's goal is to push hard through June, then spend six months playtesting and balancing the game for a release in February 2005. And fear not—LucasArts promises a joint Xbox and PC release this time.

It's far too early for us to pronounce any type of judgment on the quality of *The Sith Lords*. All we can tell you is that as a work in progress, with a team that clearly loves what it's doing and has nothing but the highest praise for the first game, the *Knights of the Old Republic* sequel appears to be in capable hands.

We have a good feeling about this.



COMPUTER GAMING WORLD'S 2004 OVERRATED/UNDERRATED LIST

THE LAST WORD ON THE TRIVIAL AND THE TRIUMPHANT IN PC GAMING

How does the saying go? "One man's poison is another man's wine," isn't it? Since we're PC gamers, we don't go much for wine—unless, you know, it's carbonated or spelled with an "h." So, let's rephrase the expression. How about this: One man's *Doom* is another man's *Daikatana*. Yeah, that's better. Cozy up to the bar while we tell you how we really feel about this pastime of ours—the first round's on us.

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TAVIS COBURN



THE MOST OVERRATED/UNDERRATED

HERO

OVERRATED: DUKE NUKEM

A good soldier never dies, but somehow this lameass still lingers. The only redeeming quality of this 'roid freak was stealing the good lines from the *Evil Dead* movies.

UNDERRATED: ROGER WILCO

What ever happened to games with an actual sense of humor? This unassuming space janitor cleaned house in the *Space Quest* series, and we'd take him over Duke any day.

THE MOST OVERRATED/UNDERRATED

GAME FEATURE



OVERRATED: EYE CANDY

People come in here all the time and gush about all the graphical wonders in a game they're working on. See that smoke billow?!? Notice how the water ripples?!? Did you count the zits on the developer's face?!? With all this focus on the glory of texture mapping and level of detail, we humbly ask, "When the hell will you guys quit with the damn tech demo and get on with the actual game?"

UNDERRATED: INTELLIGENT A.I.

We play games to avoid the real world (or, to be more specific, the other dumbass editors here). Notice the irony, then, when the A.I. of in-game enemies is two steps shy of the short bus. Mugging someone in *Deus Ex: Invisible War* results in the victim looking around and wondering where the noise is coming from. In the real world, clubbing Darren in the back of the head results in him getting pissed and looking for the person who took his digital camera.

THE MOST OVERRATED/UNDERRATED

RELEASE DATES

OVERRATED: WINTER

Everybody is so busy racing to get buggy, half-assed games out for the Christmas rush, all the good ones get lost. Case in point: *Beyond Good & Evil*. We think the only people who bought this game are the developers' parents—and that's a crime.

UNDERRATED: SUMMER

C'mon—ship some titles in the summertime. If *KOTOR* for PC had shipped in June (like the Xbox version, cough, cough), people would've scooped it up.

THE MOST OVERRATED/UNDERRATED

GAME COMPANY

OVERRATED: GEARBOX

How did these people hypnotize the game industry into giving them more work? After seeing Gearbox excrete *007: NightFire* and bungle *Halo* for PC, we think the company has blackmail pictures of key people with sheep. Don't race a game out the door if it isn't ready.

UNDERRATED: MONOLITH

Microsoft shouldn't be the only company in Washington that gets all the attention. Monolith has put together some of the more truly inventive games we've seen, including *No One Lives Forever*, *No One Lives Forever 2*, and *Tron 2.0*. Hell, we might even care about *The Matrix Online* game Monolith is developing. It's gotta be better than the last two movies.



THE MOST OVERRATED/UNDERRATED

MOD

OVERRATED: COUNTER-STRIKE



No disrespect, but isn't *Counter-Strike* getting a little long in the tooth? You've got a mod on a 6-year-old game, and yet it's still being used for tournaments around the world. Here's hoping a major revamp is coming out when *Half-Life 2* ships.

UNDERRATED: DESERT COMBAT

Battlefield's preeminent mod is so good, it actually clowns a bunch of sorry full games that you'd buy at retail prices. The levels are smartly designed, it has a fresh assembly of vehicles and weapons to deal damage with, and most importantly, it was made in this millennium.

THE MOST OVERRATED/UNDERRATED

ANNOYING MULTI-PLAYER TACTIC

OVERRATED: CAMPING



"CAMPER! y00 sux0rs!" Give it a rest already! Multiplayer games have changed since those straight-up death-match days; some specific modes actually involve strategic squatting. And if you know where that damn camper is, just kill him. Stop complaining already, ya noob.

UNDERRATED: FRAG STEALING

You've whittled an opponent down to his last shred of health. Suddenly, some fool pops out and finishes the kill. Then the punk shoots you in the head. ARGH! More games should have an "assist" score for partial kills. Plus, more hatred should be wrought upon those thieving fraggers.

THE MOST OVERRATED/UNDERRATED

GAMING CONTROVERSY

OVERRATED: VIOLENCE



Seriously, we never want to have to write about this again. Ever. It's old. It's done. And it was never more than a crock to begin with. No, it wouldn't be the worst idea in the world if game developers exercised some prudence, restraint, and maturity now and then. But blaming society's ills on videogames is a weak and hypocritical way to avoid facing a more serious problem: lousy parenting.

UNDERRATED: PIRACY

You want to know what's really going to kill this industry? It's not pressure from politicians or uptight parental groups. It's the constant, increasing theft and piracy of game code. These folks work hard to make your games, people. Don't screw 'em over. Pay for your games. If developers don't make money, they don't have jobs. If they don't have jobs, you don't have games. Then what are we supposed to do? Go outside? Pay attention to our families? Don't let this nightmare come true.

MOST OVERRATED/UNDERRATED

CGW HALL OF FAME GAME



OVERRATED: TOMB RAIDER

So maybe in retrospect, it really was just the breasts. Whadd'ya gonna do? They were 3D, they were big...they were breasts. Nuff said.

UNDERRATED: CRUSADER: NO REMORSE

Crusader: No Remorse is among the greatest action games ever made, with a then-revolutionary use of isometric perspective and fully destructible environments. This near-forgotten classic is in serious need of a revival.

THE MOST OVERRATED/UNDERRATED

GAMER STEREO-TYPE

OVERRATED: BASEMENT-DWELLING LOSER

Not all gamers live in mommy's basement, eating Cheetos and reeking of sock sweat. Some of them have enough money from their programming jobs to live in their own geek palaces filled with swords and cloaks.

UNDERRATED: ONLINE WOMAN OVER 40

An interesting bit of new data reveals that women over 40 make up one of the fastest-growing populations of computer gamers. First, it's Yahoo *Backgammon*. Next, it's PopCap's *Zuma* or *The Sims*. These are the gateway drugs to full geekdom. We salute you ladies, brave champions of gaming! Send photos.





THE MOST OVERRATED/UNDERRATED

STORY

OVERRATED: HALO

Master Chief. Cortana the A.I. Space marines. All the pretensions of a grand epic, but in the end, what really happened? You ran around a giant donut weapon. All sorts of bad stuff happened. Chief is tough. Cortana is snappy. Marines get killed. That just about covers it.

UNDERRATED: ANACHRONOX

Anachronox gets far too little credit for its witty space-adventure tale of a wide, mismatched cast that humorously subverts old clichés. It's the story of a loser detective, a back-talking robot, and a squat, smelly guy. It was set up to have a sequel...which, unfortunately, is not gonna happen.

THE MOST OVERRATED/UNDERRATED

GENRE

OVERRATED: MMORPGS



The shrill, high-maintenance girlfriend of games, MMOs seem sexy at first, but in the end demand too much of your time, offer few rewards, deal constant setbacks, and are a steady drain on your wallet. We haven't played one we weren't ultimately grateful to break up with.

UNDERRATED: PUZZLE GAMES

The reliable booty call of games, a good puzzle game can break up the grinding workday with a quick nooner or keep you up all night long with its simple, uncomplicated delights. Perfect for when you just can't work up the commitment for a more demanding game.



THE MOST OVERRATED/UNDERRATED

BAD GAME

OVERRATED: DAIKATANA



Whine all you want about the robot frogs, the unimaginative levels and weapons, and an entire generation's worth of delays—at least it actually ran when it shipped. A terrible game to be sure, but without the antistar cachet of John "Suck It Down" Romero and the towering hubris of Ion Storm, *Daikatana* is just another eminently forgettable shooter.

UNDERRATED: TRESPASSER

Was it the Sponge World physics engine that made it suck so very, very hard? The health meter heart tattoo that actually forced you to glance down and check out your character's heaving bosoms? Was it the insanely awkward extended character arm, the torturous 1-frame-per-lifetime framerates, or the near-constant stacking of those terribly spongy crates? Answer: all of that and then some. In the end, *Trespasser* is simply the most incompetently slapped together nonpaintball PC game in history, and one that doesn't get near the infamy it is due.

THE MOST OVERRATED/UNDERRATED

CGW STAR RATING

OVERRATED: BLACK & WHITE

We were wowed early by the lifelike creatures and the graphics—but because it was the one time we didn't finish the game before writing the review, we let the designer's pedigree and our early impressions lead us into making a huge, five-star mistake. Never again.

UNDERRATED: BALDUR'S GATE

A reviewer with an incredibly large ax to grind and an inability to see the brilliant revitalizing of the *D&D* license because of a plot allegedly stolen from an early '80s RPG led to the most negative four-star review we've ever published.

THE MOST OVERRATED/UNDERRATED

GAMELOCK SIDE EFFECT

OVERRATED: STAYING UP LATE

Sure, we've all stayed up far too late playing *Half-Life*, *X-Com*, *Baldur's Gate*, and *Battlefield 1942*. But we've all stayed up too late watching *Mary Tyler Moore* reruns or reading comics, too. Staying up late is a genuine gaming hazard, but it's a hazard shared with lots of other obsessions.

UNDERRATED: DREAMING ABOUT A GAME

This is the real risk in obsessive gaming: a game that won't let you go even when you've left it. Puzzle games are the worst—we can't begin to count the nights we've spent helplessly watching lemmings march to their deaths or *Bookworm* tiles cascade endlessly in our dreams. When a game has you in its grip even when you're unconscious, you've crossed a very special threshold.





THE MOST OVERRATED/UNDERRATED

INFLUENTIAL GAME

OVERRATED: MYST

We will grant that the original was beautiful for its time and was a watershed moment for computer gaming. Plus, it was the inspiration for a million CD-ROM-drive purchases. But its influence on the adventure game genre was awful, inspiring an endless procession of ponderous, overserious clones with none of the original's creativity and spark.

UNDERRATED: MYTH

Before *Halo*, Bungie made *Myth*, a title that does not get nearly the props it deserves as essentially the first successful 3D real-time strategy game, complete with a brilliant, beautiful engine that lets you swoop around, zoom in and out, and change perspectives. It also emphasizes squad tactics over base building and resource gathering—a bold move at the time. Seriously, has any RTS since done anything better?

THE MOST OVERRATED/UNDERRATED

GRAPHIC EFFECTS



OVERRATED: WATER EFFECTS

Yeah, the water in *Morrowind* and *Far Cry* and pretty much every game these days looks great and superrealistic—how much impact does it have on gameplay? Zilch. It may help create a more believable game world, but after the initial "Oh, look at that," we tend to overlook it and take it for granted, just as in real life.

UNDERRATED: DISORIENTATION EFFECTS

They're the least flashy effects in gaming—and deliberately so. But the smeared monochromatic visuals, muffled sound, and drunken movements that come from various attacks in games like *Call of Duty* and *Far Cry* add a pulse-quickening sense of desperation to combat and make gameplay all the more gripping.

THE MOST OVERRATED/UNDERRATED

GOOD GAME

OVERRATED: GTA: VICE CITY

GTA3 was a revolutionary title with a grand scope, and the frenzy of media attention garnered by its violent gameplay elements only aided its groundbreaking success. Its follow-up, *Vice City*, reaped all of the same benefits with a minimum of truly fresh elements. It's not a bad game—just an overrated one.

UNDERRATED: SYSTEM SHOCK 2

This *CGW* Hall of Fame inductee is the definition of "cult classic." A first-person RPG with numerous science fiction elements, *System Shock 2* is a technogeek's dream come true. Too bad it never achieved the popularity of the Looking Glass-developed *Thief* games that its engine was derived from—this one is a real gem.

THE MOST OVERRATED/UNDERRATED

RPG CHARACTER CLASS

OVERRATED: MAGE

So your wizard can lob enough fireballs at his enemies to make s'mores out of them. That's all well and good, until someone sneezes on him. Mages can dish out the punishment, but they sure can't take it.

UNDERRATED: CLERIC

When your army of fighters runs out of potions, this is who you want waiting nearby. Everybody appreciates having a trusty healer around—especially the mage who just got sneezed on.

THE MOST OVERRATED/UNDERRATED

INDUSTRY POSITION



OVERRATED: GAME DESIGNER

OK, so we wouldn't exactly have all these great games to play if it weren't for some of the talented designers out there—or the talented artists, programmers, and beta testers. The point is, game designers typically get the lion's share of the credit when there are really a lot more people working behind the scenes.

UNDERRATED: QUALITY ASSURANCE

Game testers really don't get the credit they deserve. As absurd as it may sound, this is a tough job—some of these guys put in an unthinkable number of hours when it comes time to debug a game. If we didn't have testers, every new game would come out looking like an MMO on launch day—that is to say, buggy as all hell.



THE MOST OVERRATED/UNDERRATED

LEVEL

OVERRATED: MOH: ALLIED ASSAULT—OMAHA BEACH

OK, OK, we get it: War is hell. This level garnered awards a couple years back, but enough with the scripted scenes showing us the chaos of World War II.

UNDERRATED: TRON 2.0—REFORMATTING LEVEL

Never before has formatting a hard drive been this exciting. If you didn't play *Tron 2.0* when you had the chance, hang your head in shame. This level had us freaking out, racing, and trying to kill off enemies while avoiding getting deleted.

THE MOST OVERRATED/UNDERRATED

WARCRAFT III HERO

OVERRATED: PRIESTESS OF THE MOON

Her scout powers and ranged bonus make her useful, but opponents are going to see your game plan coming a mile away.

UNDERRATED: LICH

Two words: Frost Nova. Keep him safe and level him up. Kills enemies.

MOST OVERRATED/UNDERRATED

XP-EARNING METHOD

OVERRATED: MONSTER KILLING

Killing monsters for XP may be the status quo, but that doesn't mean it isn't monotonous as hell. Besides, it isn't even accurate. When's the last time you gained a level by killing a giant rat?

UNDERRATED: STORY BASED

Moral quandaries and multiple-choice puzzles are excellent wellsprings of experience points and actually allow us to roleplay. Plus, it's a nice change of pace from getting into random encounters for five hours.

MORE O/U

GAMING BEVERAGE
OVERRATED: ENERGY DRINKS
UNDERRATED: BOOZE

FPS MULTIPLAYER GAME
OVERRATED: CTF
UNDERRATED: DEATHMATCH

GAME DIFFICULTY MODE
OVERRATED: HARD
UNDERRATED: EASY

CGW DISC
OVERRATED: CD-ROM
UNDERRATED: DVD

CGW MONTHLY FEATURE
OVERRATED: GREENSPEAK
UNDERRATED: TABLE OF CONTENTS

CGW INTERN
OVERRATED: THIERRY "SCOOTER" NGUYEN
UNDERRATED: DI LUO

FPS WEAPON
OVERRATED: ROCKET LAUNCHER
UNDERRATED: SHOTGUN

RPG SPELL
OVERRATED: FIREBALL
UNDERRATED: SLEEP

KING'S QUEST GAME
OVERRATED: KING'S QUEST VII
UNDERRATED: KING'S QUEST III

CGW READER COMPLAINT
OVERRATED: SPELLING ERRORS
UNDERRATED: WE'RE JUST PLAIN STUPID

GAMING BUZZWORDS
OVERRATED: RAG-DOLL PHYSICS
UNDERRATED: GAMEPLAY

FMV ACTOR
OVERRATED: MALCOLM MCDOWELL
UNDERRATED: KARI WUHRER

THE MOST OVERRATED/UNDERRATED

LUCASARTS GRAPHIC ADVENTURE

OVERRATED: THE CURSE OF MONKEY ISLAND

It's definitely got a unique look to it, but it's just missing...something.

UNDERRATED: ZAK MCKRACKEN AND THE ALIEN MINDBENDERS

A tabloid journalist goes on a quest to stop aliens from taking over the phone company and enslaving the planet. What's not cool about that?



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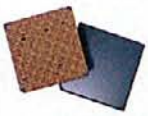
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Hop in turrets to turn back the scum in assault and onslaught modes.

PUBLISHER: **Atari** DEVELOPER: **Epic Games** GENRE: **FPS** ESRB: **M** REQUIRED: **Pentium III 1GHz, 128MB RAM, 32MB videocard, 5.5GB install** RECOMMENDED: **Pentium 4 1.8GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB videocard, several backup USB mice**

EDITORS' CHOICE COMPUTER GAMING WORLD

Unreal Tournament 2004

Let's get ready to Giiii

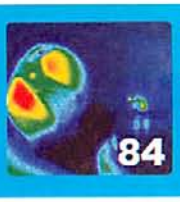
Inside



Battlefield Vietnam
Not a sequel, not an expansion pack—so what is it, and is it worth it?



Far Cry
Long stretches of excitement broken up by hair-melting frustration.



Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow
Time to exercise the Fifth Freedom again.

If *Unreal Tournament 2003* was supposed to convey the feel of a futuristic blood sport, it was spring training at best. This season, *Unreal Tournament 2004* scores big in an age of slower-paced, semirealistic FPS titles. What could've been a train wreck of levels, weapons, vehicles, and play modes crammed together actually translates into the quintessential adrenaline-fueled fragfest.

Too much is never enough

There's one fundamental problem with this game: There is too much stuff here to describe within two measly pages. So let's work with the biggest, most obvious improvements first—the return of assault matches and the introduction of onslaught skirmishes. These two modes alone make *UT2004* worth the price of admission.

Assault, inexplicably absent in *UT2003*, not only returns to the delight of fans, it comes greatly improved. First, there is no more guesswork in what the hell you're supposed to be doing half the time. Prefight flybys (in single player) detail objectives while in-game arrows, voiceovers, and the in-HUD map remove all doubt. This lets you focus on strategy and action. The scenarios themselves are varied enough so that the objectives—like attacking a skaarj mothership or stealing a tank—don't grow stale.

Onslaught mode, though, is *UT2004*'s centerpiece, and it'll suck up most of your time. It's really an amped-up *Battlefield* match. As in assault, all the guesswork is removed, thanks to a simple onscreen map that shows which control nodes are connected, active, or under attack—all steering you right toward the action. As you furiously scramble for nodes, the goal is to work your way toward and then disable the enemy base. Sound simple? It isn't. You'll find out the hard way when a Goliath tank and Raptor decimate your outpost.

And therein lies the game's beauty—it's expertly balanced. For every Goliath tank driver, there's a Manta master or Raptor pilot who can rip you a new one.

In the driver's seat

The vehicles are fantastic and easy to figure out. More important, each has its own nuances to master: Take a flying leap with a Manta off a cliff and then alt-fire, and you can mow down people like a riding Toro on crack. You haven't lived until you decapitate seven guys while driving by. Scorpions can dart in and sting tanks with a couple of shots, and so on. The most over-the-top vehicle, though, has got to be the trundling Leviathan. It's slow but roomy, seats six, has five turrets, and transforms into a big-ass stationary cannon.


Just for a sense of perspective: The Hellbender in front seats three. That massive transforming monstrosity in the distance is the Leviathan.

Hey, just because you have vehicles at your disposal doesn't mean you'll be able to run rampant. Many new weapons are introduced to keep things fair. The AVRiL rocket launcher can take out a Goliath in a couple hits...but you need to keep your aim trained so that the missile can lock on to its target. Link guns do a lot more than double up damage when you tether with another ally: They serve as field repair kits to fix busted rides and mend your damaged outposts. So long as you can spot and hide from the enemy, try calling in air strikes with the Painter guns. Or if you're really sinister, lay down some sticky grenades or enemy-chasing spider mines. This isn't even going into all the classic weapons that return, including the sniper rifle.

Keep 'em simple, stupid

As you may have guessed by now, while *UT2003*'s biggest selling point was its graphics, here it's the polish. The controls are tightened, the interface feels right, all the new elements are balanced, and the single-player season is vastly improved over *UT2003*'s. This time around it better reflects the impact of team upkeep, trading, and advancing through a league. But the single-player campaign also introduces the only significant beef that we could come up with about *UT2004*: your teammates' A.I. and your ability to command them on the fly. Don't let the PC auto-assign tasks to the bots prior to a match. When that was the case and I tried issuing overriding commands (defend this node, whatever), my teammates would make affirmative responses, but when I turned around, they were nowhere to be found. Ah, but that is small potatoes. The problem was solved by assigning offensive and defensive roles to the bots before a fight.

Besides that and the slightly tired techno soundtrack, we can't think of a single reason you shouldn't already own *Unreal Tournament 2004*—unless you have a sluggish computer, that is. The modest system specs on the box will rob you of the full experience. Still, this is only the beginning. Imagine the maps, scenarios, and mods that will come in the following months. **Darren Gladstone**

Verdict ★★★★★
Too busy shooting...must...write...review.

The simple addition of assault matches and onslaught skirmishes alone is worth the price of admission.

But wait, there's more!

Remember how we just mentioned that there's way too much here to fit onto two pages? Well, here's why:

Over 100 maps: All the maps from *UT2003*, plus lots of new ones, including 1-on-1 arenas.

Lots of modes: DM, team DM, capture the flag, double domination, bombing run, as well as glorified mutators such as last man standing, invasion, and mutant.

Tons of Mutators: Yep, they are included as well.

Voiceover IP support: Don't like the in-game taunts? Make some of your own.

PUBLISHER: **Electronic Arts** DEVELOPER: **Digital Illusions Canada** GENRE: **Multiplayer FPS** ESRB RATING: **T** REQUIRED: **Pentium III 933, 256MB RAM, 64MB videocard, 2GB install, broadband Internet connection** RECOMMENDED: **Pentium 4 2GHz**

Battlefield Vietnam

Whoopee! We're all gonna die!

For those worried about any possible offensiveness, be aware that *Battlefield Vietnam* isn't really about Vietnam. This is just a generic jungle playground where online geeks can play "army," running around and pretending to shoot one another. That's not meant to be condescending or dismissive—overall, *Battlefield Vietnam* is an awesome game. The point is, this is an action game, a cartoon, and any similarities to real life are purely coincidental. And for a game set in an extremely controversial, emotionally charged setting—one which many older gamers were alive to remember—this is not a bad thing. It's a relief.



I am a sniping, camping weasel.

Jungle boogie

This follow-up to *Battlefield 1942* (it's not really a sequel or an expansion) has wisely left the original's core gameplay and controls intact while upgrading virtually everything else. There are 12 huge, new, almost all brilliantly designed maps to play on in three different modes: assault, in which one team holds all the control points and the other team must try to take them over; head-on, in which each team starts with just one control point and they race to control the rest; and mission, which provides more unique goals and challenges. The most intense of the mission maps is Landing Zone Albany, an absolutely brutal map in which new spawn points for the North Vietnamese team will dynamically appear near control points as they are captured by the U.S.—thus simulating an ambush. It's a sniper's paradise, like many maps here, and whether that's a good thing to you or not will largely determine how much you enjoy this game. (Me, I'm a weasel that way, so I'm happy.)

There are 12 huge, new, almost all brilliantly designed maps to play on.

All the weapons and vehicles are new, and many are devastating—especially the choppers, which, because they are obviously more maneuverable than planes, can rain down death in merciless fashion. Passengers can now fire weapons while riding in vehicles—a welcome addition that makes vehicles themselves much more of an offensive force. The only real bummer in the new stuff? The M-60 machine gun, which is so powerful and easy to use that it lets even blundering newbies rack up ridiculously high frag counts. It needs tuning down.

The interface has been improved, with a timer visualizing control-point takeovers, and the graphics are much more detailed and add an almost eerie realism—you really feel like you are hiding in dense foliage. The downside is annoyingly long load times—for me, up to two full minutes—and on servers with lots of map cycling, that's a lot of downtime. All those cool '60s songs that play during the loads, very atmospheric and welcome at first, get really old really fast. I love the Kinks, but I never want to hear "You Really Got Me" ever again. Seriously.

This game is a bit more hardcore and unfriendly than the original *Battlefield*—and as such, it might be more appealing to veterans than newbies. The maps are tougher, the fighting more furious, the spawn points more crammed together. It's a bit chaotic, a bit of a nightmare. Which means maybe it is about Vietnam after all. **Jeff Green**



It's not "Vietnam," but it is a rich jungle environment.

Verdict ★★★★☆

Scarier, tougher, and prettier than *Battlefield 1942*.

PUBLISHER: **Ubisoft** DEVELOPER: **Ubisoft Milan** GENRE: **Tactical Shooter** ESRB RATING: **T** REQUIRED: **Pentium III 800, 128MB RAM (256MB for Windows 2000/XP), 32MB videocard 2GB Install** RECOMMENDED: **Pentium 4 1.3GHz, 512MB RAM, 128MB videocard** MULTIPLAYER: **Internet, LAN (2-64 players)**

Rainbow Six 3: Raven Shield—Athena Sword

Tom Clancy falls on his sword

It was six years ago that *CGW* first commissioned this fledgling game journalist to review Red Storm's landmark game *Rainbow Six,* unaware that the game was about to completely change the shooter landscape with realistic squad-based combat, heart-pounding action, and meticulous strategic planning. *Rainbow Six* was exhilarating and addictive...and hamstrung by game-crashing bugs and A.I. issues. Fast-forward to 2004 and *Athena Sword,* and you'll find the same high-octane intensity...and the same bugs and A.I. problems.



The *Unreal*-powered graphics really shine in the character models and environmental interaction.

Cache report

Relying on default mission plans, *Athena Sword's* single-player eight-mission game should take only a few short hours to complete. Set in a richly drawn Mediterranean, *Athena Sword* marks the return of those pesky anarchist leftovers previously killed off in *Raven Shield.* Now, your elite team of global counterterrorists must hunt them down across Italy, Croatia, and Greece. True to its pedigree, operations like the Streets of Milan mission define intensity as you work your way down the street, confronting terrorists who leap out from behind cars or snipe from above. Maps MGare larger than normal, so more time is required for completing objectives, especially when planning the Castle in Milan, Luxury Hotel, and Agora Market missions.

Athena Sword also adds three classic maps (Siberian base, subway station, and embassy) from previous *R6* games and tweaks them for added depth; also present is a new countdown mode, which slaps missions with the added duress of a time limit. The mission pack adds seven more weapons, creating an arsenal even Saddam Hussein would have coveted. There's the potent M240GK 7.62mm caliber machine gun, the zippy SM4 submachine gun, the overbearing M1014 (M1) shotgun, and the SKHL8, which makes for a good long-range sniping weapon. However, none of these weapons feel necessary beyond what's already been offered.

The franchise's ace in the hole is multiplayer gaming, and this is where *Athena Sword* stands out. There are five new multiplayer maps, along with five new game modes—adversarial terrorist hunt, adversarial scattered hunt, capture the enemy, kamikaze, and countdown—adding even more to an already excellent multiplayer spread. The addition of Punkbuster really helps clean up the cheaters and lamers, too.

Sword of Damocles

Even though *Athena Sword* updates *Raven Shield* with the latest 1.54 patch, several annoying bugs remain. Aside from experiencing the occasional crashing-to-desktop frustration, sound anomalies, texture-compression issues, frame drops, netcode glitches, and the same "Invalid CD Key" bug that haunted *Raven Shield,* there's also a slew of new annoyances, chiefly a stubborn problem in which the game balks at installing if you've got a CD-RW or DVD-RW drive. Granted, that info is on the box, but if you've bought a computer in the last two or three years, you'll be thwarted by this exact problem. Add a barely improved enemy A.I. that features terrorists who still patrol right past the dead guy next to them or become deadeye shots with pistols at distances over 50 meters, and it appears the franchise will never overcome this sorry tradition. What you end up with is a marginalized blockbuster.

What you end up with is a marginalized blockbuster.

If you can overlook the bugs, *Athena Sword* sits beside *America's Army* as the ultimate tactical simulation. But how can you? Perhaps before I'm old and gray and ready to retire my keyboard, I'll be able to report that game 57 in the series is bug free. **Raphael Liberatore**

Verdict ★★★☆☆

There's no excuse for this game having the same sorry bugs and lame A.I.



In the excellent new capture-the-enemy multiplayer game, teams go at it until all players from one side get handcuffed. For a real challenge, try it with pistols only.

PUBLISHER: **Ubisoft** DEVELOPER: **Crytek** GENRE: **Shooter** ESRB RATING: **M** REQUIRED: **Pentium III 1GHz, 256MB RAM, 64MB videocard, 4GB install** RECOMMENDED: **Pentium 4 3GHz, 512MB RAM, 128MB RAM, Forgiveness** MULTIPLAYER: **LAN, Internet (2-20 players)**

Far Cry

Oh, you'll cry all right



This hang glider is the most original of the several usable vehicles in the game. Better land before reaching that copter, though.

Kudos to *Far Cry* developer Crytek for placing this first-person shooter in a tropical paradise instead of the usual dystopian hellscape. Let's hear it for A.I. that is, for the most part, actually intelligent. Hooray for the incredible game engine with its lush graphics and seemingly endless draw distances. Congrats on the frantic firefights, the nice variety of vehicles, and a number of open-ended environments that allow you to tackle the tactical challenges of the game in a number of ways.

Oh, and one more thing—howsabout a nice whack upside the head with a tire iron for a horrific save-game feature that is simultaneously terribly conceived and idiotically implemented? On second thought, how about *several* whacks upside the head for that one?



Not only are the views in *Far Cry* sweeping, but you can also reach most of the land in this shot without a separate level load.



Some jeeps offer you a nice choice between machine gun or rocket launcher for taking out enemy helicopters.

Far Cry ships! First patch announced!

Incredibly, that's the subject line of an e-mail we received the very day this review was being written. And frankly, it's no surprise. Your response to *Far Cry* will pretty much hinge on whether you can tolerate its checkpoint-style game saving. This is a game you'll love one minute and want to drop in a chemical toilet the next—though once this patch fixes the saving mechanism come mid-April, you'll probably love it more.

Shipping this sometimes difficult game without a quicksave, or at least a generous allotment of auto-saving checkpoints, is one of the most blatantly stupid design decisions ever. Initially, I could deal with the periodic notices that the game was saving itself—the save points seemed to appear fairly often. But before long, save placement became increasingly schizophrenic, with checkpoints placed as closely

as at the opposite ends of a short, enemy-free corridor, or so distant it took in excess of 30 to 40 minutes of play time to reach one from the other. No one likes replaying huge, time-consuming portions of a game, and especially not when it seems that the game is cheating or playing unfairly as it forces you to retread your steps yet again, but that is precisely what *Far Cry* inflicts upon its players. To call the frustration and rage that follows "all-consuming" is to exercise a kindness toward it that it scoffs at bestowing upon you.

Dry your tears

It would be so easy to dismiss *Far Cry* and the devastating effects of its save system as just another game disaster, but the truth is, the game does so many other things not just well but exceptionally, that you almost hate the game more because it could be so great. The easy thing to call out is the game engine: There may not be a more stunning-looking game released this year, and yes, I'm including *Doom 3* and *Half-Life 2* in that assessment. The lush archipelagoes are just drop-dead gorgeous with rich color and a vibrant sense of life, and they're absolutely huge, with a viewing distance to match.

Far Cry apes the weapon restrictions of *Halo*, but more effectively. Here, you can carry only up to four different weapons, all with some sort of alternative fire, be it launching grenades or just zooming in slightly for sharper aim. Instead of the big, bigger, biggest nature of most shooter arsenals, each of *Far Cry's* weapons serves a specific strategic purpose.

And make no mistake, you'll be strategizing plenty. The A.I. in the game is for the most part outstanding. Oh, there's the occasional *Blair Witch*-style stand-in-the-corner guy, but the mercenaries you battle for most of the game will attack you unpredictably (you'll get to test this a lot during those constant reloads): working in groups, circling through cover to attack you from behind, and more. But you get the same opportunity more often than not, thanks to levels that let you approach your objectives from the front, the rear, from back roads in armed jeeps, or from the air in a hang glider. To play *Far Cry* is to be in a state of constant vigilance.

Regrettably, some of that vigilance is due to the game apparently cheating. Despite a stealth meter on the interface, I found the game to be absolutely uncanny at times at finding me. At one point, I belly-crawled up a hill only to be immediately picked off when I reached the crest by a rocket-launching mercenary who couldn't have had any idea where I was or would be.

Bungle in the jungle

Perhaps less fair are the mutant apes and soldiers called tridgens that you eventually fight in the game. Yep, in spite of a nice helping of originality, Crytek still felt compelled to add giant mutated superapes with rocket-launcher arms to the mix. OK, fine, we understand—giant mutated superapes with rocket-launcher arms are practically a shooter mandate. Still, *Far Cry* tends to throw tons of these guys at you, often in very cramped quarters, and they just don't want to die. And they won't take splash damage from their own rockets, a nifty trick that your character, unfortunately, can't pull off. And the end game with these guys and, of course, that save system...oof.

Far Cry has a multiplayer game, but *Unreal Tournament 2004* is out now, so really, who cares? This is a potentially great single-player shooter undone by a staggeringly awful save system that only heightens a discomfiting sense of intentionally malicious unfairness. Never has a promised patch been more crucial; never has a game's release been more wrong-headed. **Robert Coffey**

Verdict ★★★½☆

There's a good, maybe outstanding, game lurking under all the frustration. Good luck getting at it.

This is a game you'll love one minute and want to drop in a chemical toilet the next.



With or without the jeep, the last levels are a nightmare.



The federally mandated "crawl through an air duct and kill mutants" portion of the game.



Rappelling mercenaries are a breeze to kill when you've got some nifty night vision.



You'd think that with the supermutant apes all escaped and running amok, the mercenaries would want a truce with you. They don't, so you must put deadness into them.

PUBLISHER: **Ubisoft** DEVELOPER: **Ubisoft** GENRE: **Stealth Action** ESRB RATING: **T** REQUIRED: **Pentium III 1GHz, 128MB RAM, 3GB install, 64MB videocard** RECOMMENDED: **Pentium 4 1.8GHz, 512MB RAM, headset (for online play)** MULTIPLAYER: **Internet, LAN (2-4 players)**

Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow

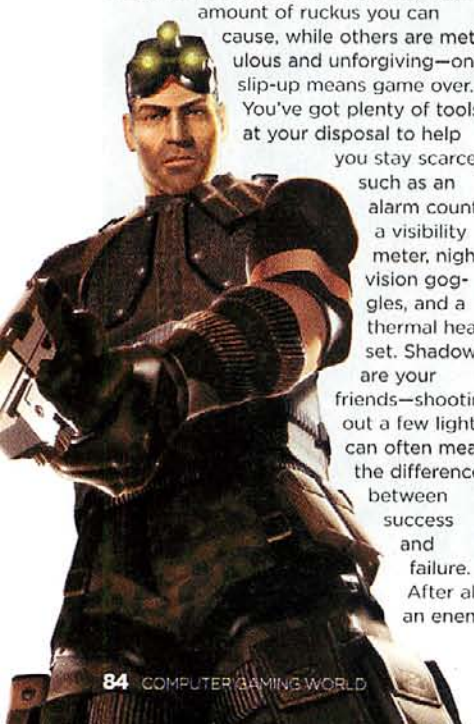
...or rather, Pandora Whenever the Patch Comes Out

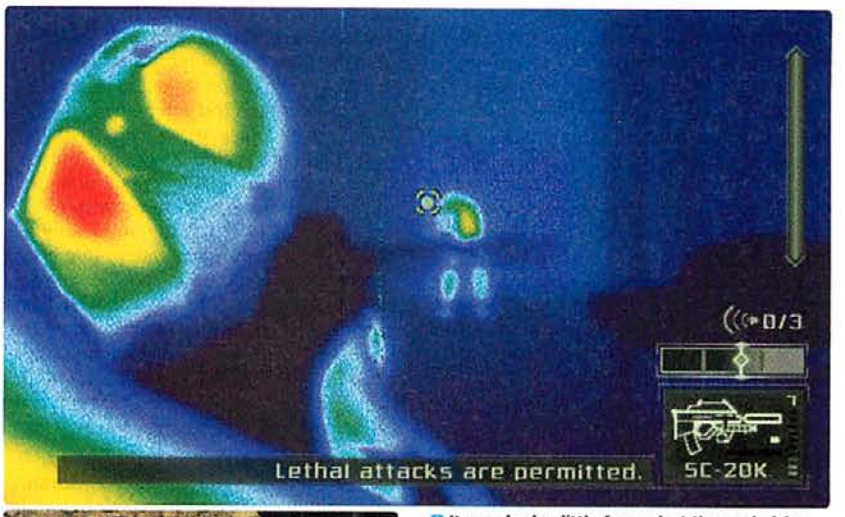
The title of this game couldn't be more apt. For those who didn't play the first game, the term "Splinter Cell" refers to a consummate government superspy, disavowed by his country and blessed with the "fifth freedom"—carte blanche to steal, assassinate, and wreak whatever manner of havoc is deemed necessary to uphold national security. He is a ghost, a glitch in the system. And that's precisely what we have here: glitches. Lots of them. But we'll get to that soon enough.

Fisher King

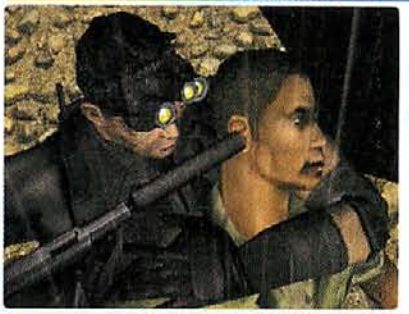
In this case, the eponymous Splinter Cell is none other than cynical, hard-as-nails operative Sam Fisher, the stealthy fellow from last year's hit game. Not afraid to pull a few triggers, he's a prime candidate for plenty of messy black-ops assignments. Here, Fisher is charged with tracking a biological terrorist around the globe and putting a stop to his chemical-warfare agenda.

As Fisher, you'll sneak—and occasionally shoot—your way through nine increasingly complex stealth missions, each with its own set of objectives and rules. Some missions give considerable leeway to the amount of ruckus you can cause, while others are meticulous and unforgiving—one slip-up means game over. You've got plenty of tools at your disposal to help you stay scarce, such as an alarm counter, a visibility meter, night-vision goggles, and a thermal headset. Shadows are your friends—shooting out a few lights can often mean the difference between success and failure. After all, an enemy guard can't see a well-placed head shot coming from total darkness.





It may look a little funny, but thermal vision comes in handy sometimes.



Hold your enemies at gunpoint to interrogate them or keep them quiet.

The missions in *Pandora Tomorrow* are entertaining and cinematic; Fisher's got lots of gadgets and acrobatics to help him through tight spots and nigh suicidal situations. One particularly memorable mission involves the infiltration of a passenger train, making for a number of exhilaratingly close calls. Missions vary in length; you're in for a good 12 hours of playtime, give or take a few trial-and-error challenges brought about by the game's highly scripted and linear nature.

Abort mission

And that brings us to the bad stuff: *Pandora Tomorrow*'s brand-new and highly touted multiplayer features. Just to clarify, the multiplayer mode absolutely rules—provided you can actually get it working. Unfortunately, it's hampered by numerous crash bugs, graphical and voice-chat glitches, and a frustrating anticheat bug that has already prompted a user-created patch. The fact that a company with Ubisoft's resources would task its customers with fixing its game's biggest feature is inexcusable.

Bug issues aside, the multiplayer mode is a lot of fun. Up to four players can compete, using any of three capture-the-flag-style variant rule sets. Players are split into two teams: traditional *Splinter Cell*-esque spies and a band of FPS-style mercenaries. The two character types have their own unique abilities, equipment, and overall play style, and the addition of voice-chat support (via a headset) makes for an added layer of depth and strategy.

Make no mistake: *Pandora Tomorrow* is a worthy, good-looking follow-up to its stellar predecessor—and if Ubisoft can fix the slew of multiplayer problems, the company just might have a real classic on its hands. **Ryan Scott**

Verdict ★★★½☆

A four-and-a-half-star game riddled with far too many critical bugs.

PUBLISHER: **EA Sports** DEVELOPER: **EA Sports** GENRE: **Sports** ESRB RATING: **E** REQUIRED: **Pentium III 500, 64MB RAM (128MB for Windows 2000/XP), 8x CD-ROM drive, 700MB install** RECOMMENDED: **Pentium III 700, 256MB RAM, 32MB videocard** MULTIPLAYER: **Hotseat, Internet (2 players)**

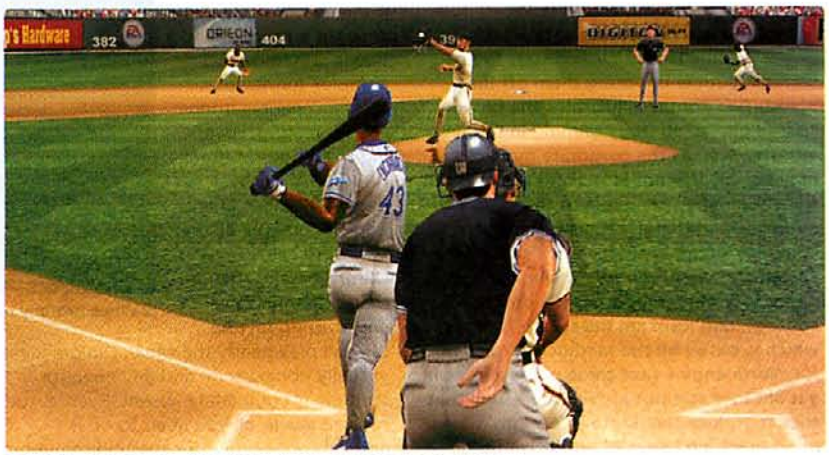
MVP Baseball 2004

Looks good but lacks soul

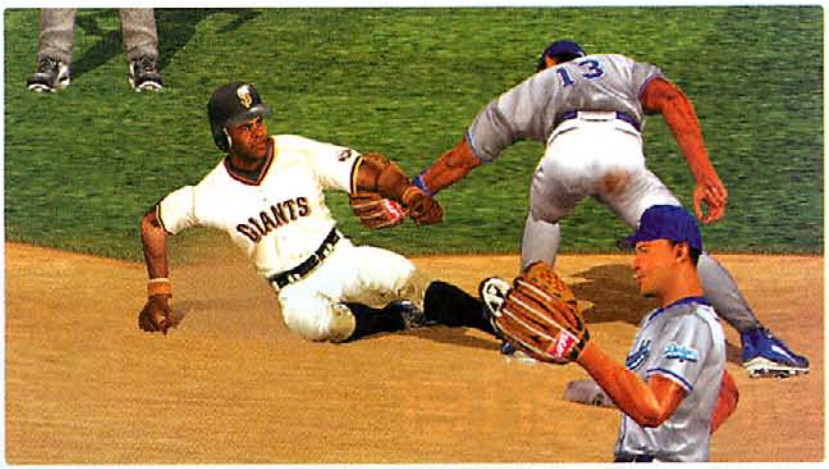
Last year, EA Sports had the courage to realize that its *Triple Play* baseball title was terminally terrible and happily put it out of its misery. Instead, the company introduced *MVP Baseball*, a much better game than *Triple Play* could ever hope to have been. But that's some scant praise, since *MVP* is now the only baseball game in town for PC. Even so, it arrives with its fair share of disappointing rough edges, such as the painfully generic commentary engine and somewhat inconvenient controls.

Several of my gripes with the game involve the occasional lack of said controls. EA caught a lot of flak for not implementing decent mouse support in last year's *MVP*; this year, it seems to have swung the pendulum too far in the other direction. The only way to navigate the menus is with the mouse, which is fine when you're researching player stats, but midgame, it would be nice to be able to control the whole game using only a gamepad.

Where the game really disappoints is in its dynasty mode, in which you can become the GM of a team for 120 years, guiding it to greatness. It's an ambitious undertaking, but despite greatly enhanced mouse support for the menus, stats research in *MVP* is not well implemented, so this hampers your efforts to build that perfect team. For example, *MVP* doesn't let you sort players at a given position by their different stats, which really slows down research.



Quick reflexes save Jason Schmidt from a baseball lobotomy.



Neifi Perez gets a pretty good jump but is gunned down stealing second.

MVP makes up for its lack of depth with good looks and plenty of polish.



No baseball game in memory comes close to conveying the drama that *MVP* can.

There have been online reports that A.I.-controlled teams in dynasty mode will often carry 15 pitchers on a 25-man roster, which is as absurd as it is unrealistic. I checked the A.I. teams' rosters in my own dynasty mode and found this to be the case with many of them. This unbalances the pool of available pitchers on draft day and leaves teams without any bench depth for late-inning strategizing.

After all that griping, the game is still fun to play, and one thing it does very well is convey the ball movement of pitches. And *MVP 2004* has a slew of pitches, ranging from the ordinary (two- and four-seam fastball, curve, cutter, slider, change-up) to the more unusual, such as the screwball, knuckle ball, slurve, circle change, and palm ball (a variant of the change-up).

At the end of nine, what you have is a fun baseball game that, to some degree, makes up for its lack of depth with good looks and plenty of polish. If only *MVP* could couple that flash with the statistical and gameplay excellence set by *High Heat* a couple of years ago—then you'd have a surefire pennant winner. **Dave Salvator**

Verdict ★★★½☆

A good game that could be destined for great things but isn't quite ready for The Show.

PUBLISHER: **Strategy First** DEVELOPER: **Paradox Entertainment** GENRE: **RTS** ESRB RATING: **E** REQUIRED: **Pentium II 450MHz, 32MB RAM, 130MB install** RECOMMENDED: **Pentium II 600MHz, 256MB RAM** MULTIPLAYER: **So very utterly moot**

Two Thrones

You're fired!



When Brittany ruled France...and boredom reigned supreme.

Strategy First and Paradox Entertainment need to watch some reality TV and start firing people or voting them off the island. *Two Thrones* illustrates the broken "paradigm" of strategy gaming in today's industry. It is, as the corporate monkeys may say, an attempt at making a successful franchise more accessible to the mass audience and therefore increasing the company's market share. This ridiculously shallow spawn of *Europa Universalis* makes a mockery of its predecessor's depth, strategy, and loyal fan base. *Two Thrones*, which is based on the mediocre *Crown of the North* engine that came out last year, is yet another attempt at "*EU* Lite"—one that tries to reduce the depth of *EU* into a mind-numbing series of repetitive tasks.

Played on a relatively attractive 2D map, *TT* divides Western Europe into a series of provinces, each with farms, markets, towns, churches, and castles. Towns and markets provide cash, farms provide food, and so on. Once you upgrade these things in a few provinces, cash won't be a problem, and you can build up huge armies. These armies of thousands are built by recruiting 25 men at a time; one wonders if the corporate goons thought a production queue would be too complex for newbies.

The scenario settings are interesting, covering the length of the Hundred Years War between France and England, as well as the War of Roses. Unfortunately, other than different dates and starting factions, they all play nearly the same. Diplomacy is virtually nonexistent, and any need for strategy is completely absent. Even at the hardest levels, all you need to do is upgrade your provinces methodically in order to defeat your unresponsive A.I. opponent. Paradox hasn't even made an effort to really update the game from *Crown of the North*—town options still include things like "freeing slaves," and the player can't even recruit longbow men, the distinctive soldiers of the English. The option exists, but it's "grayed out" until you install the patch.

Such shallow gameplay is ridiculous. Does Strategy First expect anyone who knows and cares about the difference between the House of York and a peppermint patty to want a game that's the historical equivalent of solitaire? Instead of trying to make millions on a budget of thousands, these folks need to stop milking the *EU* cash cow and make another original, absorbing, and relatively bug-free title—like the one that made them successful in the first place. **Di Luo**

Verdict ★½☆☆☆

It gets an extra .5 for the low price.

PUBLISHER: **Hip Games** DEVELOPER: **GSC Game World** GENRE: **FPS** ESRB RATING: **M** REQUIRED: **Pentium III 750, 128MB RAM, 32MB videocard, 800MB install** RECOMMENDED: **Pentium 4 2GHz, 512MB RAM, 128MB videocard** MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **LAN (2-32 players)**

FireStarter

Outsourcing is not your friend



A ghoul gets up close and personal with the mutant's four machine guns.

F*ireStarter* proves a cliché: You really do get what you pay for. This FPS import from the Ukraine is better than most budgetware, but it is otherwise underwhelming in a market glutted with flashier and meatier titles.

FireStarter supposedly has a story, but since there's no dialogue, cut-scenes, or real missions, it doesn't really matter. You simply pick one of the game's six characters (soldier, android, chick assassin, etc.), make your way through 16 levels, kill everything, and snatch "artifacts" that occasionally pop up. If you fail, you restart. Combat is repetitive and clunky, broken up by annoying pauses that show you new monsters and artifacts.

The special abilities you pick each time you defeat a level do add some depth: They make you stronger, allow you to carry more weapons, or grant you some other minor ability. The game's customizable characters would have been fun for multiplayer, but since only LAN play is supported, it's doubtful you'll ever experience multiplayer.

The sound is bland, the graphics are a bit better than those in *Quake II*, and the gameplay is reminiscent of a high-school project from a couple of precocious students. Buy it as a cheap gift for an annoying cousin. Otherwise, save your money for a real game. **Di Luo**

Since only LAN play is supported, it's doubtful you'll ever experience multiplayer.

Verdict ★★☆☆☆

It's better than *Deer Hunter*.

PUBLISHER: **Whiptail Interactive** DEVELOPER: **Media Mobsters** GENRE: **RTS** ESRB RATING: **M** REQUIRED: **Pentium III 600, 128MB RAM, 32MB videocard, 700MB install** RECOMMENDED: **Pentium 4 1.1GHz, 512MB RAM, 64MB videocard** MULTIPLAYER SUPPORT: **LAN, Internet (2-8 players)**

Gangland

An offer you might want to refuse...

It seems that Media Mobsters spent all of 20 minutes brainstorming a plot and then set about the grueling task of designing an almost fun game. In short, five brothers grow up together in Sicily. Three of the brothers kill the fourth, Chico, and flee to America. Mario, the remaining brother, vows to teach his naughty siblings a lesson involving water and cement shoes. It's off to Paradise City, U.S.A., to see Uncle Vincenzo, the local mob boss, for a classic, if uninspired, story of revenge.

Protection racket

Gangland has its moments, and I admit that I found it to be sometimes enjoyable, if sometimes impossible. Unlike a traditional RTS, you take over structures instead of building them. The restaurant attracts standard units to be hired. The gun shop allows you to upgrade weapons and get a steady supply of ammunition. To gather resources, Mario muscles in on relevant businesses. With these resources, Mario can purchase special units from other crime families.

Gangland has some features that set it apart. Mario can choose a wife who will dutifully churn out children who grow up to become one of three kinds of underbosses: lawyer, seductress, or enforcer. You can steal or buy a variety of vehicles for use in drive-by shootings. Paradise City comes alive with hundreds of citizens wandering from business to business, spending their money or waiting to be hired. Police roam the streets, either pacified by bribe money or actively trying to shut you down, Elliot Ness style.

However, all these features are hard to savor, since the game's fast pace makes managing your turf a hectic, confusing ordeal. In gunfights, units need to be micromanaged to take cover, crouch, or use special attacks, but the frantic pace makes this nearly impossible. You must juggle a multitude of tasks, including acquiring businesses and defending them, and taking on contracts and completing them within time limits. A pause function allowing command over your units, à la *Freedom Force*, would be welcome. As it stands, all but the simplest tactics are impossible to orchestrate.



"My son the lawyer and my daughter the seductress. A gangster dad couldn't be more proud."

Each level devolves into amassing enough goons for a blitzkrieg.

Sleeps with the fishes

Other features simply don't work well. The atrocious vehicle physics make even a short cruise to the corner a bumper-car ride. An invisible barrier prevents you from driving onto the sidewalk, though you can mow down anyone foolish enough to walk into the street. Your enemies usually attack mindlessly, even moving single file through a killing zone. You cannot save your game in the middle of a level. And, each new level is a new scenario, so not all of your accomplishments follow you. By the time you read this, there should be a patch that amends this problem, but still.

In the end, *Gangland* can be fun, if frustrating, to play. Just steel yourself for its limitations. **Stephen Gehringer**



This infiltrator is a wicked special unit who assassinates a goon, takes his place in the rival family—and requires lots of micromanagement.

The game's fast pace makes managing your turf a hectic, confusing ordeal.

Verdict ★★★☆☆

A lot of possibilities and potential, but the riot of unmanageable action makes it hard to enjoy.

JAMDAT Bowling 2

The original had over two million downloads—
JAMDAT Bowling 2 is twice as good.

"Convincing physics, beautiful interface, head-to-head competitions — Bowling 2 is a huge step forward."
— *wgamer.com*



User selectable themes



One button control of spin, aim and power



Live multiplayer scoring



Realistic bowling physics





JAMDAT Solitaire



Tony Hawk's Underground



The Return of the King



Multiplayer Bejeweled



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CLASSICS ON THE GO

Did you know?

Mega Man, Castlevania, Bomberman, and more are available for your phone



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- Five questions with Trip Hawkins
- N-Gage tries again with a redesigned system and new games

Mega Man

Our favorite blue hero returns!

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N-GAGE TRIES AGAIN>>

With a redesigned system and a better lineup of games, Nokia takes another stab at the Nintendopoly



Nokia's redesigned N-Gage QD is, by any measure, a much improved system—it's got a stronger battery, buttons you can actually press, and (gasp!) a freely accessible cartridge port. All this effort, though, is useless without better games, something the Finns have faced problems with ever since the portable game deck launched last year.

This situation could be turned on its side once Nokia launches the QD this summer alongside a wave of new, original games that take advantage of N-Gage's natural strengths. Top among them is *Pocket Kingdom: Own the World*, a strategy title from Sega that will unfold before players on a truly global scale. You use your forces to invade other players' pocket kingdoms via wireless Internet, waging war against their army and raising your rank with each victory. The ultimate object: to be on top of the worldwide heap.







If Sega can make *Pocket Kingdom*'s battles addictive enough, it may just have the N-Gage killer app Nokia's been waiting for. That's not all N-Gage has coming out this summer, though—EA is porting over *The Sims: Bustin' Out*, and Nokia is working on *Ashen*, a horror-themed shooter with four-player deathmatches via Bluetooth wireless connection.

Will Nokia turn N-Gage around this year? That's up in the air, but at least the company is trying harder.



5 QUESTIONS WITH TRIP HAWKINS>>

Electronic Arts founder sees wireless as gaming's new frontier


LG VX6000

He was there in the early days of Apple. He founded EA. He launched the 3DO game console and later the publishing company. Now, Trip Hawkins sees the wireless games market as the future and recently founded his own wireless studio, Digital Chocolate. We sat down with the man to see why he's so excited by the wireless medium.

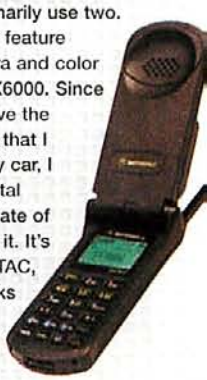
1UP: Why the move into the mobile market?
Trip: It's the computing frontier. Entrepreneurs need to be on the frontier, where there is opportunity to blaze some new trails. It is early enough in this industry to pioneer many new ideas and to work hard to improve quality standards.

1UP: You've compared the mobile market to your early days at Apple and EA. How is this so?
Trip: When I founded EA, there were over 100 small game publishers in a cottage industry. Technology was very primitive, and development costs were low. There was room in the market for experiments and innovation. Prior to that, I was at Apple in the early days when the industry view was that only data-entry clerks and IT professionals could use computers in an office, that the general public was incapable of using a computer, and that there was no way anyone would ever buy computers or software in a retail store. These kinds of issues are typical in new media, which is what makes it so much fun to pioneer and change the world. All of these syndromes apply to the mobile space, where the prevailing view is on the device as a phone, not as a mobile computer. As such, the best is very much yet to come.

1UP: How did you come up with the name Digital Chocolate?
Trip: The thinking is that names like Apple Computer and Electronic Arts are memorable and can define new categories because they combine words that do not initially appear to belong together. Words like "apple," "art," and "chocolate" have a lot of emotional brand value, and the concept of their digital versions intrigues people and makes them more approachable. And in the case of Digital Chocolate, we view the mobile consumer as someone who has a slice of time to indulge in a moment of indulgence with a digital snack. Chocolate is the champagne of snacks!

1UP: What do you see as the future of mobile gaming?
Trip: Mobile networked communities. Stand-alone applications like games and ringtones will be a growing market, but we have to focus on the fact that the primary reason that people carry a mobile phone is to be socially connected. Most mobile computing applications that are interesting in the future—including future games—will have significant server-side components and social interaction

1UP: Which phone do you carry?
Trip: Of course, I now have many of them, but I primarily use two. One is a nice new feature phone with camera and color display, the LG VX6000. Since it does not yet have the hands-free car kit that I want for use in my car, I have an older digital phone that was state of the art when I got it. It's the Motorola StarTAC, which already looks like a dinosaur!



CLASSIC GAMING ON THE GO>>

We're taking it back to the old school

Ah yes, the classics. They never get old. They're easy to pick up, fun to play in brief spurts—why not carry them with you at all times? 1UP takes a look at some of the best vintage titles currently and soon-to-be available on your mobile phone. For info on availability, which phones support them, as well as where to download them, check out our expanded guide on wireless.1UP.com.



FROGGER

Both the original arcade mode and a new mode with enhanced graphics are available in Upstart Games' mobile port of *Frogger*. AT&T mMode subscribers with Nokia handsets can try this out, but not in traffic, please.



MEGA MAN

The Blue Bomber is back! All six of the original levels and weapons are present in miniature here for *Mega Man* fans with nothing to entertain them but their phone. Our big question: Will it still have the Elec Beam pause trick?



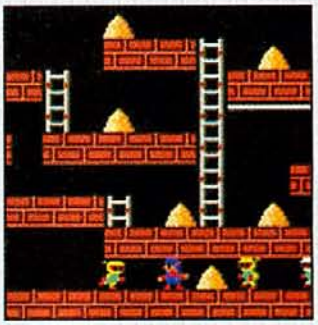
COMMANDO

Capcom's top-down shooter comes to the BREW mobile platform courtesy of Upstart Games. The mobile experience of throwing grenades and shooting your way through enemy forces is available now to Verizon subscribers.



1942

The coolest thing about this mobile port of Capcom's WWII plane shooter? The still-intact inverted rolls. Also carried over from the original are the weapon power-ups and accuracy counters. It's available on BREW handsets.



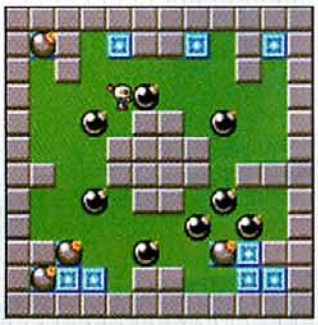
LODE RUNNER

Since this game has shown up on every platform ever conceived, a mobile port was bound to come out at some point. Good thing, as it's tons of fun. Drill and fill an unending series of mazes to trap pursuing monsters and gather treasure.



CASTLEVANIA

Take control of Simon Belmont and venture into Dracula's castle once again in Upstart's port of the NES classic. Unlike recent *Castlevania* installments that have relied heavily on RPG elements, this one is all about good ol' whip-em-up action.



BOMBERMAN

It's the classic, totally addictive, simple 8-bit *Bomberman*—sans multiplayer, but without many complicated extras either. Blast down walls, bomb a maze of monsters, and collect power-ups to build a better Bomberman.



ADVENTURE ISLAND

Master Higgins lives, and the jungles of *Adventure Island* don't look half bad on the mobile platform. This remake features eight areas, sizable bosses, and the Master's powered-up fireball attacks. Only you can save Higgins' girl, Tina.



BURGER TIME

The greatest food-themed maze chase ever. Why animated fried eggs and hot dogs are chasing this chef across a *Donkey Kong* ladder rack isn't quite clear, but why argue with a good time? One burger to go, please.



FINAL FANTASY

Square Enix hasn't formally announced much for the States yet, but it just bought mobile developer UIEvolution, and they'll be showing off the Japanese versions of *Final Fantasy* and *Dragon Quest* at E3. 2 + 2 = __?



HALF-LIFE 2

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*ATi's RADEON 9800XT 256MB DDR compared with Nvidia Geforce FX5900Ultra 256MB DDR, tested on the following system: P4-3.2GHz CPU, Intel i875P chipset, Windows XP Professional with ATi driver v.7.93 and NVIDIA driver v45.23. Resolutions: 1600x1200 4XAA.

The Ultimate $2,500 Gaming Rig



TIRED OF FEELING LIKE A SCHMUCK 'CAUSE YOU DON'T HAVE A

I had been feeling so good about things. Vendors weren't calling my bosses threatening to pull ads because of things I had written. The Tech section was growing by leaps and bounds. I was turning my stories in on time. Hell, Kristen even went so far as to call me the "king of deadlines." Well, I just couldn't handle all of that positive feedback. So I thought to myself, "Self, what's the best way to make your life difficult?"

"Ah," I thought, "do a system roundup. That always pisses people off." Thus, here I am, a week past my deadline. I'm avoiding Kristen like she's a bill collector, and the second this issue hits newsstands, my bosses will once again be beset by vendors who want my editorial head on a stick.

Things are once again as they should be.

Through the fire

Every January when I do the Ultimate Gaming Machine story, I get a ton of reader mail asking me why I don't do a roundup of more affordable machines. My answer is usually something along the lines of "Because I don't feel like it." That said, there is a lot to be gained from rounding up midrange machines. I decided to invite a number of manufacturers to compete, with the only requirements being that they submit a complete machine (computer, monitor, and speakers) that costs no more than $2,500.

Because of the price cap, I knew some of the more expensive companies would have to make some serious compromises. But, of course, that's where the fun begins.

BY WILLIAM O'NEAL PHOTOGRAPHY BY ARNOLD TIOSEJO



$5,000 GAMING RIG? STOP CRYING, NANCY—YOU ONLY NEED $2,500



Gateway 710G Gamer

PRICE: **$2,160** RATING: **4.5**

While it isn't the fastest machine in this roundup, Gateway's 3.2GHz Pentium 4-based 710 Gamer has everything any gamer could want: 1GB of PC-3200 DDR400 memory, a 160GB SATA hard drive, Nvidia's 256MB GeForce FX 5950 Ultra graphics card, multiple DVD drives, and Intel's rock-solid D875PBZ motherboard. Add to that a standard ATX case that's easy to get into and parts that are easily swapped in and out, and there's no reason any gamer wouldn't be pleased with this beast.

In testing, the 710G Gamer ran through my battery of benchmarks flawlessly. While its 3DMark2003 (v.340) score of 2310 at 1280x960 with 4x AA and 8x AF turned on is a good 300 points below the 2675 that the Vicious machine scored, its 3D GameGauge 3.5 score of 63fps at the same resolution puts it right in the mix with the boutique rigs.

Incredibly, considering the price cap, the Gateway machine seems to have shipped devoid of any obvious compromises. In addition to the core components listed above (components that verify its gaming pedigree), the 710G is also an awesome multimedia machine. The DVD multidrive lets users burn their own DVDs, and the multimedia card reader/writer has support for Memory Stick, Smart Media, CompactFlash/Microdrive, and SD/MultiMediaCard.

If there's anything I don't like about Gateway's desktop rigs, it's the continued use of wimpy power supplies. The 710G Gamer reviewed here shipped with only a 250W power supply. Of course, since Gateway doesn't use proprietary parts, you can easily drop an Antec True480W power supply in its place.

Voodoo Hexx c:355



PRICE: **$2,500** RATING: **4.5**

The Hexx is Voodoo's latest attempt to add a little spice to PC design. When it comes to overall performance, the Hexx is clearly the fastest machine here. It dominated the AquaMark 2003 tests and was bested only by the Vicious machine in 3DMark2003 and Falcon's Mach V in 3D GameGauge 3.5. That said, what makes the Hexx stand out are the awesome components that ship with it, as well as its unique design. The AMD Athlon 64 3000+ CPU is overclocked, as is the 256MB ATI Radeon 9800 XT graphics card, and the case's unique design uses the 425W Enermax Noisetaker power supply to keep it all cool. While its case appears smaller than the norm, the Hexx is able to accept standard ATX motherboards. For instance, Voodoo shipped this baby with Asus' K8V Deluxe motherboard (its the VIA K8T800 chipset is the current favorite chipset for building Athlon 64–based machines). Voodoo also shipped the Hexx with 1GB of Corsair PC-3200 DDR400, dual 80GB Hitachi Deskstar hard drives in a 160GB RAID 0 configuration, and Plextor's DVD+/-RW combo drive. Voodoo came in right at the $2,500 price limit, which is why it went with onboard audio as opposed to Creative Labs' Audigy 2, and AMD's Athlon 3000+ as opposed to the more powerful 3400+.

Compromises aside, the Hexx we looked at is an awesome machine. It's plenty fast, has a good mix of components, and is easily one of the best-looking PCs we've ever seen.

Falcon Northwest Mach V

PRICE: **$2,495** RATING: **4.5**

Where Gateway threw everything you could possibly want in its 710G Gamer, Falcon used the lion's share of the available $2,500 on core components, only "skimping" when it wouldn't affect performance. The Mach V we tested ships with an Asus K8V Deluxe (VIA K8T800 chipset) motherboard, AMD's Athlon 64 3400+ processor, 512MB of PC-3200 DDR400, a 120GB Seagate Barracuda hard drive, and a 256MB Nvidia GeForce FX 5950 Ultra graphics card. It should come as no surprise that the Mach V is a screamer. In fact, it posted the fastest 3D GameGauge 3.5 scores at both 1280x960 and 1600x1200. But that doesn't do this machine justice. More specifically, the Mach V scored the fastest framerates in every game we tested. That's right—every single one.

Of course, Falcon had to make some serious compromises to make our price cap. The Mach V we tested shipped with a single DVD-ROM drive—there will be no CD and/or DVD burning for you! Furthermore, it was the only machine to ship with 2.1 speakers (Creative Labs' Inspire T2900) as opposed to the more common surround-sound setups. And it shipped with the smallest monitor, a 17-inch NEC CRT.

While it lacks many of the bells and whistles the other machines boast, I rather like the Mach V's simplicity. And the Coolermaster ATC-201 is one of my absolute favorite cases. Ultimately, though, you'll have to decide if all that power is worth compromising the extras. That said, you can easily configure this machine with a slower processor (like an AMD Athlon 64 3000+) and use the extra dough to get a CD-RW drive, more robust speakers, or a bigger display.



Vicious PC Ninja



PRICE: **$2,499** RATING: **4.3**

Like the Falcon Mach V, Vicious PC's Ninja kicks mad ass at the expense of shipping with a bevy of "cool" components. The rig is built around MSI's K8T Neo (VIA K8T800 chipset) motherboard, AMD's Athlon 64 3400+ processor, 1GB of Corsair PC-3200 DDR400 memory, and a 256MB ATI Radeon 9800 XT. Obviously, this machine was built for speed. And to that end, it achieved the highest 3DMark2003 scores in this roundup: 2675 at 1280x960 and 1932 at 1600x1200. Similarly, its AquaMark 2003 scores of 32 and 25 frames per second were just a single point below those of the Voodoo Hexx.

Of course, that speed comes at a cost. With dual 36GB Western Digital hard drives in a 72GB RAID 0 configuration, the Ninja has the least amount of storage space of all the machines in the roundup. Audio duties are handled onboard, and the Ninja shipped with only a single optical drive. Thankfully, it was a DVD+RW/+R drive.

Shipping a machine with a clear case takes balls, as it really puts the onus on the system builder to clean up that cabling mess. The Vicious machine looks nice, which may help you forget that a clear, plastic PC case may or may not give free reign to carcinogens.

Criticisms aside, I really like this machine. If I were inclined to go the Vicious route, I'd go for the AMD Athlon 3000+ and, as I said in the Falcon write-up, use that extra cheddar for something else. In the case of the Vicious PC Ninja, I'd go for more storage space.

Dell Dimension 8300

PRICE: **$2,399** RATING: **4.1**

Like Gateway's 710G Gamer, Dell's Dimension 8300 showed up stacked. In addition to a 3.2GHz Intel Pentium 4 Extreme Edition processor, Dell's entry boasts 1GB of PC-3200 DDR400 memory, a 250GB SATA hard drive, a Creative Labs Audigy 2 sound-card, and CD-RW and DVD+RW/+R drives—not to mention Altec Lansing surround-sound speakers. If there's any shortcoming to the Dimension 8300 package, it's that Dell shipped it with a 128MB ATI Radeon 9800 PRO instead of the 256MB options the other six machines are rocking.

In terms of benchmarking, the Dimension 8300 definitely paled in comparison to the other machines and their more-robust graphics card options. Scoring 1907 and 1428 in 3DMark2003 at 1280x960 and 1600x1200, respectively, it was the only machine in this roundup that failed to break the 2000 mark at 1280x960. Of course, benchmarks don't tell the whole story. In actual gameplay, the Dimension 8300 showed that it's a perfectly capable gaming machine, often scoring just a half dozen or so frames per second less than the other machines. And keep in mind that it's less expensive than all but the Gateway, plus it comes with Dell's excellent tech-support reputation.

Gamers familiar with Dell's desktop machines are probably wondering why the Dimension 8300 ships with the older chassis as opposed to the newer, more-gamer-oriented XPS box. Like I mentioned earlier, insisting on that $2,500 price cap meant that everyone had to make some compromises. Ultimately, though, anyone who drops $2,500 on this machine won't be disappointed. It won't be as fast as Falcon's Mach V, but it's still fast enough.



Cyberpower Gamer Ultra 9900 Pro

PRICE: **$2,485** RATING: **3.9**



When it comes to overall performance, Cyberpower's Gamer Ultra 9900 Pro is about as fast as Gateway's 710G Gamer. It achieved 3DMark2003 scores of 2553 and 1853 at 1280x960 and 1600x1200, but the Gateway bested it in 3D GameGauge 3.5 at both resolutions. This alone wouldn't have been enough to relegate the Cyberpower machine to its position in this roundup, but when it showed up, the insides were a little...uh...out of order.

Initially, the graphics card wasn't seated in the AGP slot. I'd be inclined to blame this on the shipping company, except that the screw was nowhere to be found. This leads me to believe that the graphics card was never screwed in. Once I reseated it and began testing, it ran incredibly slowly. I delved a bit further and realized that the power cord connected to the graphics card wasn't connected to the power supply. Once I got it up and running, I didn't encounter any more problems.

When it comes to raw components, the Gamer Ultra is probably the most stacked of the bunch. The AMD Athlon 64 FX-53 processor is seated in Asus' K8V Deluxe (VIA K8T800 chipset) motherboard, and the rig ships with 1GB of Corsair PC-3200 DDR400 memory. In addition, it rocks both a DVD-ROM and a DVD+/-RW drive. Hell, Cyberpower even crammed in an Audigy 2 Z5, Creative Labs Inspire T7700 7.1 speakers, and an 18-inch Viewsonic LCD. Which begs the question: How much money is Cyberpower losing every time someone buys this machine?

iBuypower Zillion-FX



PRICE: **$2,495** RATING: **3.6**

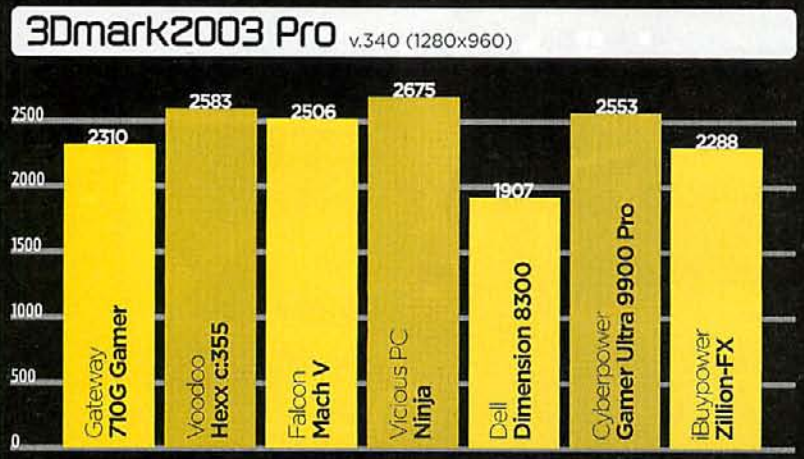
iBuypower's Zillion-FX shipped with arguably the fastest desktop CPU available—AMD's Athlon 64 FX-53—but it showed up with problems. When the machine arrived, it repeatedly failed to boot, instead returning again and again the horribly unhelpful POST message, "Boot disk failure." I poked around in the BIOS before finally figuring out that the CMOS battery was dead. Wow! I replaced it, and the machine was good to go. The thing is, had I just dropped $2,500 on a machine, I would a) expect it to work flawlessly right out of the box, and b) sure as hell not expect the CMOS battery to be dead.

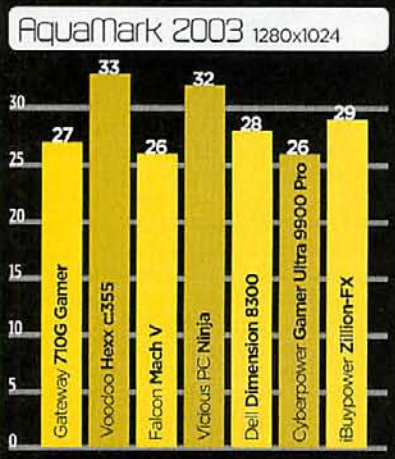
Once I got it up and running, I expected the Zillion-FX to be a screamer. In addition to that CPU, it boasts 512MB of PC-3200 DDR400 memory and a 256MB ATI Radeon 9800 XT. Strangely, its performance numbers were less than impressive. The only machine it was faster than was the Dell, and...well, the Dell worked out of the box. It's important to note that the Zillion-FX is the only Athlon 64-based machine here to ship with an Nforce3-based motherboard, Asus' SK8N-Deluxe (Nvidia Nforce3 Pro150 chipset).

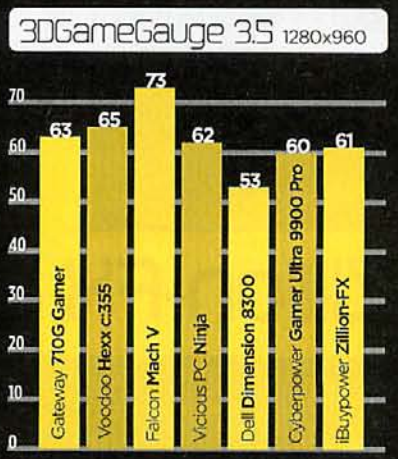
While it shipped with a nice array of components, its lackluster performance and horrible out-of-the-box experience left a bad taste in my mouth. That said, I've reviewed plenty of machines by iBuypower and never experienced any problems of this caliber. Every now and then, even a Pro Bowl quarterback throws a few interceptions.

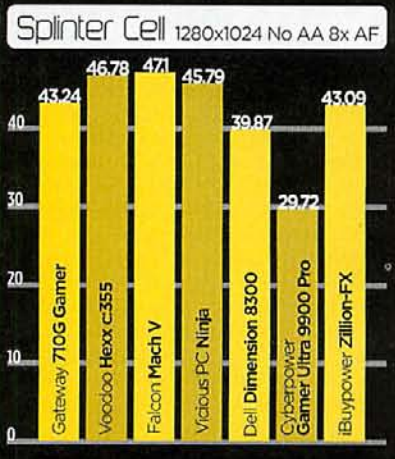
Benchmarks

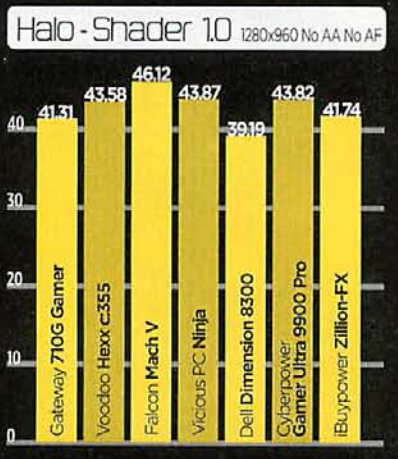
While benchmarks don't tell the whole story, they do say something. What we see here is that these machines are all somewhat similar. That said, take note of the 3D GameGauge 3.5 scores, as gaming is what it's all about anyway.













Will Power

His monthly spew of filth

Are roundups pointless?

I recently had an AIM conversation with *PC Gamer*'s Greg Vederman about the relevance of desktop roundups. As many of you know, Greg doesn't do roundups. While his reasons for not doing them may make sense to some—"Uh, Wil, what's the point? Are you telling me that since machine A performed this way that it's somehow 'better' than machine B?"—I think roundups do hold some value. Of course, when you do roundups, someone (typically the company that didn't "win") invariably gets pissed, so having an official "I don't do roundups" policy is a great way to avoid pissing people off.

More than being the final judge of who makes the best machines, roundups provide a good snapshot of what a specific amount of money will get you at a given time. For instance, the roundup I did this month shows you what $2,500 will get you from seven different companies. And while Gateway "won," that doesn't necessarily mean that its 710G Gamer is "better" than Falcon's Mach V. These roundups also show you which companies will give you the most computer for your money—and this is where outfits like Dell and Gateway shine. Because they purchase components in such high volume, they can give you the most computer for the least amount of money. (By "most computer," I mean multiple optical drives, the biggest hard drives, a ton of memory, and powerful CPUs.)

Another good thing about reviewing seven machines at one time is that you're bound to encounter a few snafus, and this gives reviewers an appreciation for what customers experience when, after dropping a few thousand bucks on a machine, it shows up and doesn't work the way it's supposed to.

Ultimately, though, Greg's comments aren't totally off base. Each machine is unique and everyone's experience is bound to be different. That said, it's always fun to drop seven bees into a jar just to see what's gonna happen.

William O'Neal

Head to Head

MANUFACTURER/ MODEL	Gateway 710G Gamer	Voodoo Hexx c:355	Falcon Mach V	Vicious PC Ninja	Dell Dimension 8300	Cyberpower Gamer Ultra 9900 Pro	iBuypower Zillion-FX
PRICE	$2,160	$2,500	$2,495	$2,499	$2,399	$2,485	$2,495
OPERATING SYSTEM	Windows XP Home Edition	Windows XP Home Edition	Windows XP Home Edition	Windows XP Professional Edition	Windows XP Home Edition	Windows XP Home Edition	Windows XP Home Edition
CASE	Gateway tower	Voodoo Baja chassis	Coolermaster ATC-201	Custom Vicious PC case	Dell Dimension tower	Black X-Super Alien	NZXT Guardian case
POWER SUPPLY	250W 110/220 switchable power supply	Enermax Noiselaker 425W	Enermax 350W	HEC 475W	250W	500-watt dual fan aluminum power supply	Works Power 420W
PROCESSOR (CPU)	Intel 3.2GHz Pentium 4	AMD Athlon 64 3000+ (2.15GHz)	AMD Athlon 64 3400+ (2.33GHz)	AMD Athlon 64 3400+ (2.38GHz)	Intel 3.2GHz Pentium 4 Extreme Edition	AMD Athlon 64 FX-53	AMD Athlon 64 FX-53
MOTHERBOARD	Intel D875PBZ	ASUS K8V Deluxe (VIA K8T800 chipset)	ASUS K8V Deluxe (VIA K8T800 chipset)	MSI K8T-Neo (VIA K8T800 chipset)	Dell-designed 875P chipset	Asus K8V Deluxe (VIA K8T800 chipset)	Asus SK8N-Deluxe (Nvidia Nforce3 Pro150 chipset)
MEMORY	1GB Infineon PC-3200 DDR400	1GB Corsair PC-3200 DDR400	512MB PC-3200 DDR400	1GB Corsair PC-3200 DDR400	1GB PC-3200 DDR400	1GB Corsair PC-3200 DDR400	512MB PC-3200 DDR400
HARD DRIVE	160GB Serial ATA hard drive	Dual 80GB Hitachi Deskstar drives in a 160GB RAID 0 configuration	120GB Seagate Barracuda 7200 rpm SATA hard drive	Dual Western Digital 36GB SATA drives in a 72GB RAID 0 configuration	250GB Serial ATA hard drive	120GB Seagate SATA hard drive	80GB SATA hard drive
GRAPHICS PROCESSOR	256MB Nvidia GeForce FX 5950 Ultra	256MB ATI Radeon 9800 XT	256MB Asylum Nvidia GeForce FX 5950 Ultra	256MB ATI Radeon 9800 XT	128MB ATI Radeon 9800 PRO	256MB Nvidia GeForce FX 5950 Ultra	256MB ATI Radeon 9800 XT
SOUNDCARD	Creative Labs Audigy 2	Onboard	Onboard	Onboard	Creative Labs Audigy 2	Creative Labs Audigy 2 ZS	Creative Labs Audigy 2
OPTICAL DRIVE	DVD-ROM Drive	Plextor 8X DVD+/-RW combo	DVD-ROM drive	DVD+RW/+R drive	CD-RW drive	Sony 16X DVD-ROM	DVD+RW/+-R drive
OPTICAL DRIVE	DVD Multirecorder/CD-RW	N/A	N/A	N/A	DVD+RW/+R drive	NEC 8X DVD+/-RW	N/A
MONITOR	Gateway VX930 19" CRT	NEC FE991 19" CRT	NEC FE771-SB-BK 17" CRT	Viewsonic G90FB 19" CRT	Dell M992 19" CRT	Viewsonic VG800 18" LCD	Viewsonic E90f+SB 19"
KEYBOARD	Gateway Multimedia Keyboard	Logitech MX Duo	Logitech Internet Keyboard	Vicious PC Multimedia Office Keyboard	Dell Multimedia Keyboard	Ideazon Crossfire Zboard	Logitech Ultra-X Desktop
MOUSE	Logitech Optical Mouse	Logitech MX Duo	Logitech Optical Wheel Mouse	Vicious PC Optical Mouse	Logitech Optical Mouse	Microsoft Optical Wheel Mouse	Logitech Ultra-X Desktop
SPEAKERS	Boston Acoustics BA 7900 5.1 speakers	Creative Labs Megaworks 5.1	Creative Labs Inspire T2900 2.1 speakers	Altec Lansing 251 2.1 speakers	Dell 5650 4.1 speakers	Creative Labs Inspire T7700 7.1 speakers	Creative Inspire T7700 7.1 speakers
MISCELLANEOUS	Multimedia card reader/ writer (Memory Stick, Smart Media, Compact Flash/Microdrive, SD/ MultiMediaCard), two 1394 FireWire ports (one on front), eight USB 2.0 ports	Two 1394 FireWire ports, eight USB 2.0 ports, S/PDIF optical and coaxial digital audio out	Two 1394 FireWire ports, six USB 2.0 ports, S/PDIF coaxial digital audio out	Six USB 2.0 ports, two 1394 FireWire ports, S/PDIF optical and coaxial digital audio out	Eight USB 2.0 ports (two on front); 1394 FireWire port	Six USB 2.0 ports, three 1394 FireWire ports	Six USB 2.0 ports, three 1394 FireWire ports, S/PDIF optical and coaxial digital audio out
SPEED (PERFORMANCE)	4.0	5.0	4.5	4.5	3.5	4.0	4.0
PRICE	5.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.5	4.0	4.0
STABILITY	4.0	4.5	4.0	4.5	4.0	3.0	1.0
SUPPORT	5.0	5.0	5.0	4.0	5.0	4.0	4.0
UPGRADEABILITY	4.5	4.0	5.0	4.5	3.5	4.5	5.0
SCORE	**4.5**	**4.5**	**4.5**	**4.3**	**4.1**	**3.9**	**3.6**



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AMD Athlon™ 64 3000+ Processor	$ 1055	CAG604



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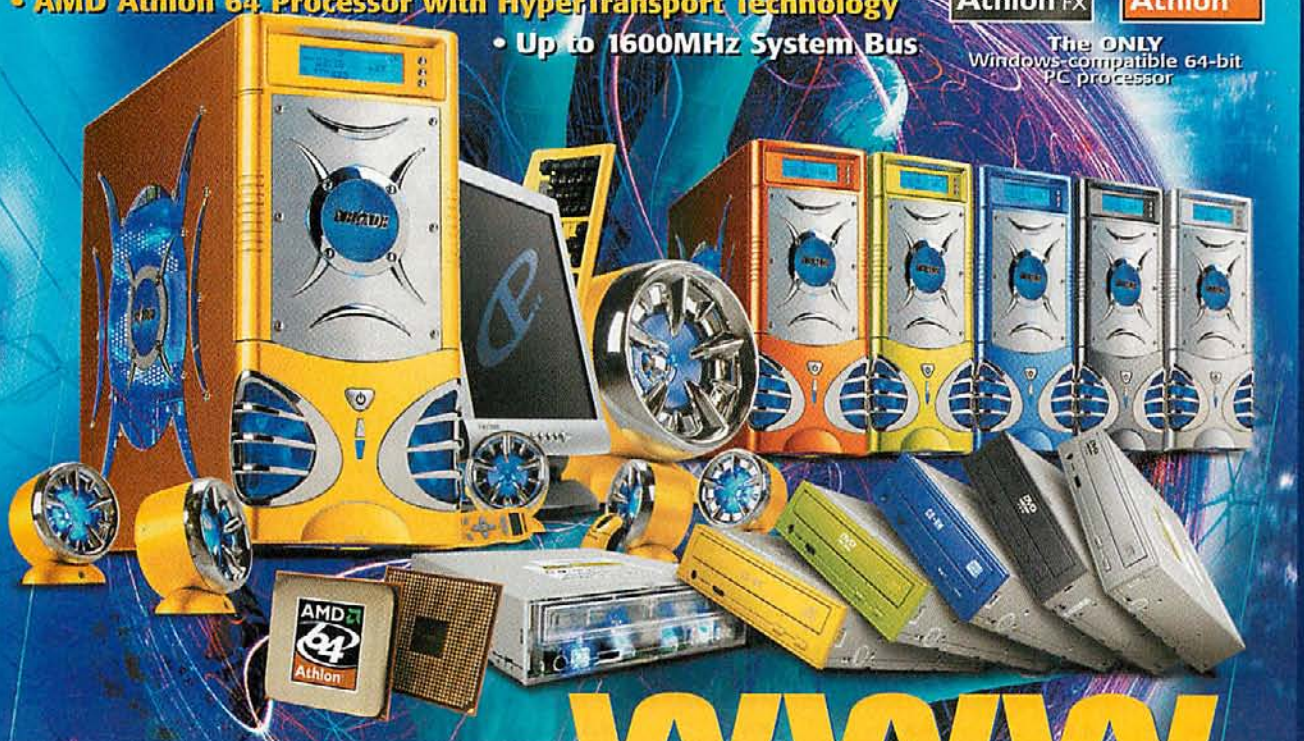
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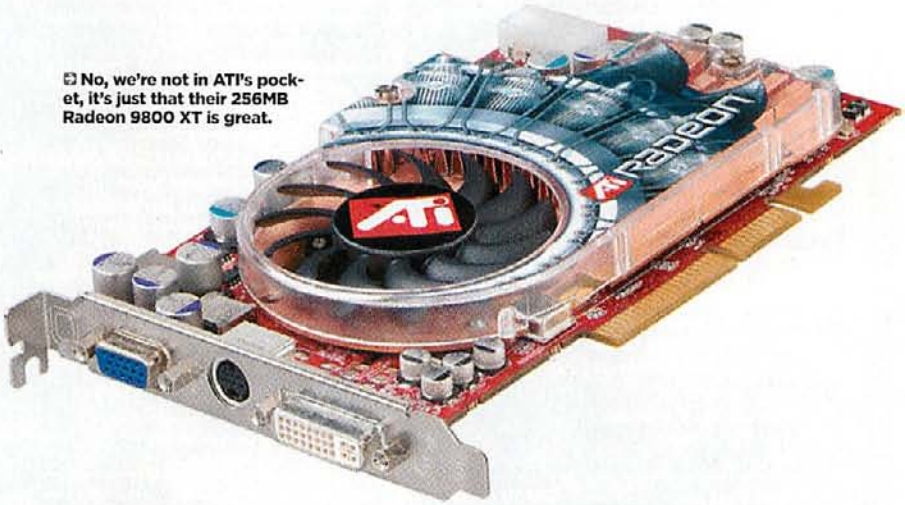
You've got questions, Wil likes big butts

A tale of two graphics cards

I'm getting a new videocard, but I'm torn between the 256MB Nvidia GeForce FX 5900 Ultra and the 256MB Radeon 9800 XT. So far, I've been leaning toward the Radeon, but I ain't sure—a bunch of my friends are saying I should go for the Nvidia.

Mustang

As far as I'm concerned, that's a no-brainer. Get the Radeon. Now, had you said the GeForce FX 5950 Ultra, it would've taken me more than 10 seconds to make that recommendation—although the answer would have been the same.



No, we're not in ATI's pocket, it's just that their 256MB Radeon 9800 XT is great.

Are you the chipset for me?

I am thinking about building an Athlon 64 system. From what I have found on the Web, the two best chipsets seem to be the Nforce3 and VIA K8T800. I haven't been able to find out which one is better. Have you done any benchmarks or do you have a clue about which one is better?

James

I've done benchmarks on mobos with both chipsets, and the VIA chipset seems to be a tad faster. Of course, any machine with an Athlon 64 CPU, a good amount of RAM, and a decent graphics card is gonna be a smoker. That said, all but one of the Athlon 64-based machines in this month's desktop roundup shipped with the VIA chipset.

Can these components go out and play?

I have a computer with a 667MHz Celeron processor, 64MB of memory with up to 11MB allocated to video memory, and a 20GB hard drive. My graphics card is an integrated Intel i810. I'm not sure what kind of motherboard I have. I'm afraid I won't be able to play games on this setup, except for maybe *The Sims*.

Matt

Sadly, Matt, your fears are warranted. If it were 1999, that machine would probably be considered high-end. Alas, it's 2004, and that machine is about as budget as budget gets. Aside from *The Sims* and anything by PopCap, you may be able to play older *Tony Hawk* and *Madden* titles. If you're interested in upgrading, start with the memory (you'll need at least 256MB). Also, try to find out if your mobo has an AGP slot. If so, dropping about $175 on a 128MB ATI Radeon 9600 XT graphics card would open up more possibilities. Of course, there's that woefully underpowered CPU.... In fact, you know what? Forget what I just told you and buy a Nintendo GameCube. You can get one at Best Buy for $100.

Buy this graphics card

Everyone wants to know, "Which card should I buy?" Buy ATI's 256MB Radeon 9800 XT. Happy?

My parents never bought me s***!

I am hoping to upgrade my system soon and I'm on a budget. I have an Asus A7V mobo with a 64MB Nvidia GeForce 2, a 900MHz AMD processor, and 384MB of RAM. If I am lucky, my parents will let me upgrade my video, motherboard, and processor for about $500 max. First thing is the graphics card. I was looking at a GeForce 5200 or 5600 or maybe something else, and I want the most bang for my buck. What would you suggest for a motherboard and processor? I would prefer AMD. (Also, $500 is the very most, so $400 would be better.)

Ryan

Sup, Ryan? I just went to Newegg.com and found these products: Transcend's ATI Radeon 9600 XT graphics card for $149, AMD's Athlon 64 3000+ processor for $211, and Asus' K8V Deluxe motherboard for $139. That adds up to $499. You're in business, kid!

It's 2004, you troglodytes

I keep reading these letters about how people don't have a DVD-ROM. They are pissed because *CGW* sent a DVD, and they are too pathetic to use it. They think the world should stop for them because they don't want to shell out $25 for a DVD-ROM drive? These are the people who are forcing me to switch CDs three times to get a game loaded. William, please tell these people to buck up or shut the f*** up!

Michael

DVD-ROM editor Ryan Scott says, "Everyone out there who doesn't own a DVD-ROM drive needs to buck up or shut the f* up!"**

Where do you people get this money?

I have an Athlon XP 1800+, 1GB of RAM, and a GeForce4 Ti 4600 graphics card. Would you recommend replacing my processor and graphics card? I would like to keep the cost under $800.

Mike

I'd get a 256MB Radeon 9800 XT (around $400 at Newegg.com) and the fastest Athlon XP processor your motherboard supports: probably an AMD Athlon 3200+ (around $200 at Newegg.com). But check with your motherboard manufacturer before you go out there and starting spending money.





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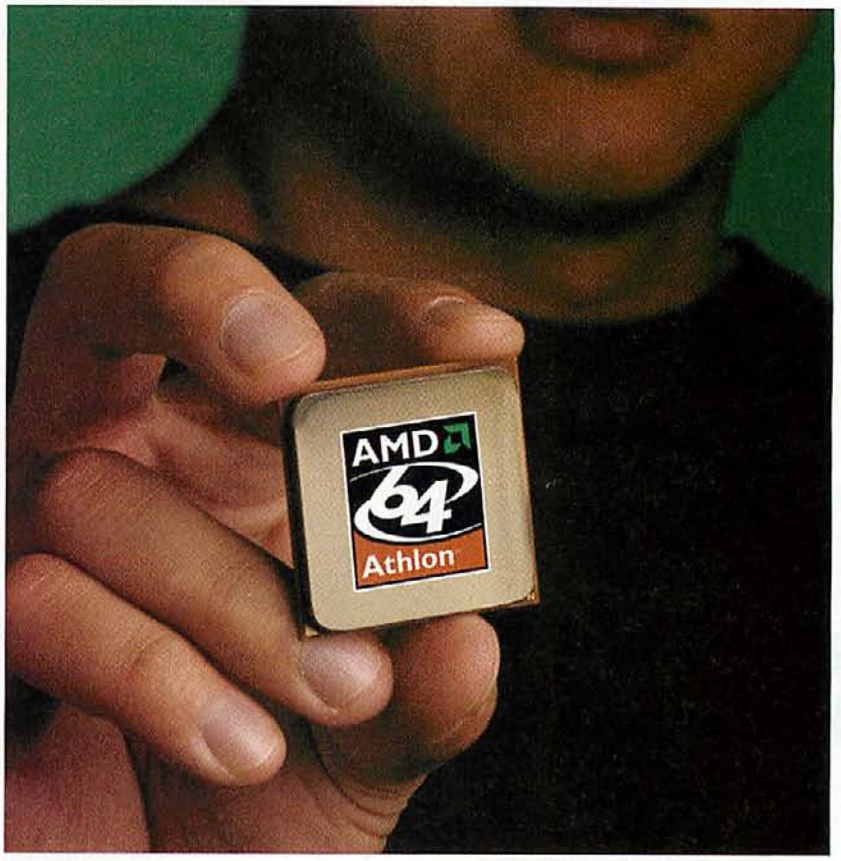
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Loyd's Cracked Case

Why 64-bit games?

Not long ago, we discussed the real reason AMD's Athlon 64 processors make such killer gaming CPUs. But with Windows XP 64-bit edition coming down the pike and Intel now officially on the 64-bit desktop bandwagon (albeit very late to the party), the fully 64-bit desktop PC is on the event horizon. So why 64 bits, and what might this mean to PC gaming?

There are two benefits to a 64-bit processor: wider registers and larger memory addressing. Other benefits of specific 64-bit architectures may also exist, but these are the two main benefits of 64-bit processing in general. Note that all the 64-bit goodness built into a CPU is useless without a 64-bit operating system, but that's a topic for a later column. Let's look at each benefit a bit more closely, assuming we have a useful and usable 64-bit version of Windows with 64-bit DirectX and so on.



Note that all the 64-bit goodness built into a CPU is useless without a 64-bit operating system, but that's a topic for a later column.

Wide load!

Wider registers allow a program to perform 64-bit computations without having to juggle multiple pieces. It can be done today on a 32-bit CPU, but it requires some juggling, since the standard arithmetic registers are only 32 bits wide in a 32-bit CPU. Of course, SSE2 registers can also be used for some types of computation, since those registers are 128 bits wide.

True 64-bit computation may not be all that interesting for games, but large memory-address spaces could be extremely useful. If you really want to build a large virtual world with tons of persistent objects, you'll need to keep track of them all. You can juggle data structures, but when the volume of data gets really huge, the ability to easily address more than 4GB of data could make life a lot easier.

Interestingly, the Athlon 64 doesn't directly support 64-bit addressing. The current version has support only for 40-bit addressing and 48-bit virtual addresses. Note, however, that 40-bit addressing means the CPU can directly address 1,099,511,627,776 bytes, or 1,024 gigabytes, of memory. That's 256 times more memory than a 32-bit CPU can address. It's unlikely that any game in the foreseeable future will need that much memory!

Thank goodness RAM is cheap!

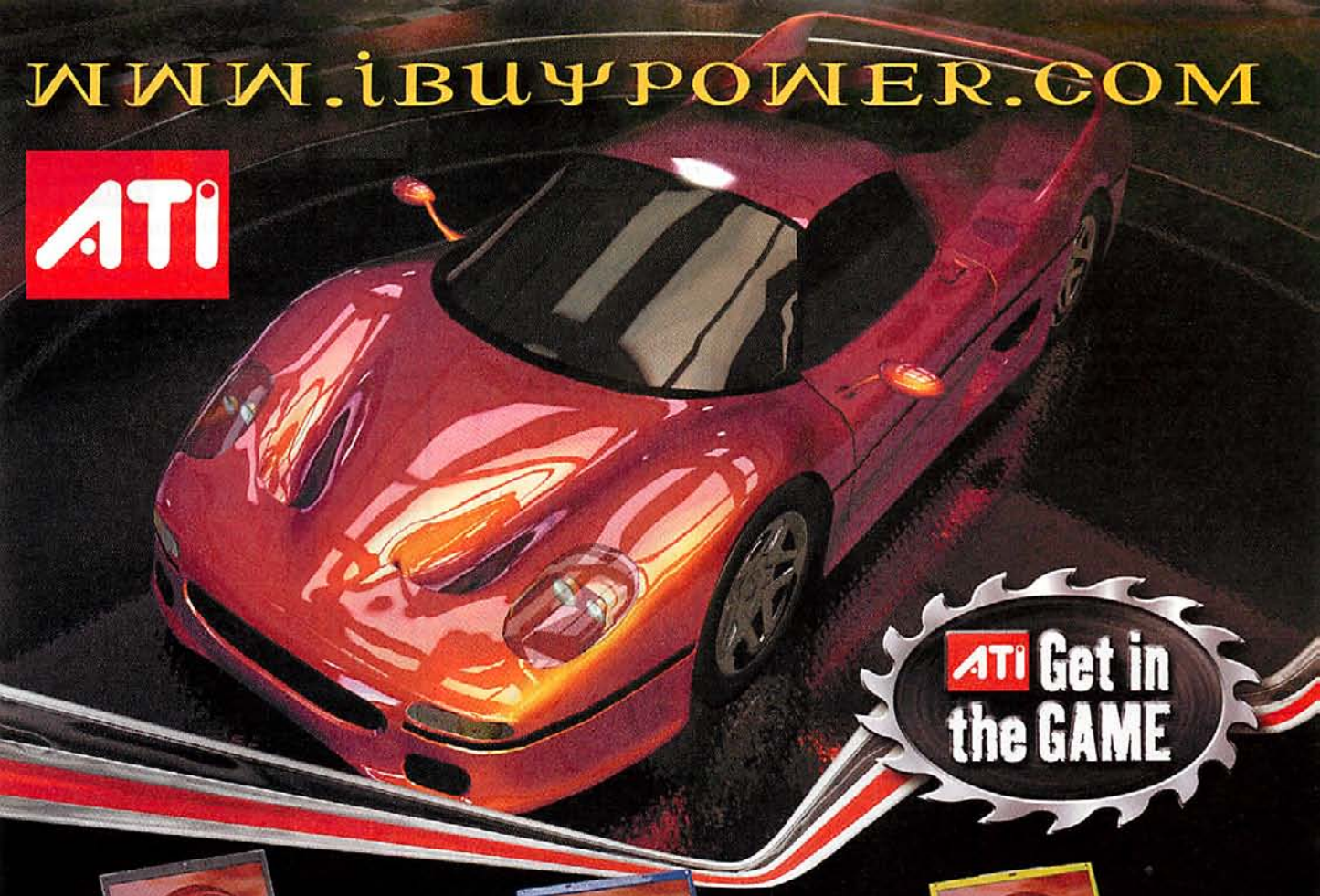
On the other hand, there's a more practical reason for a large address space: Memory densities are increasing. Within a year or two, it may be difficult to find a system with less than 2GB of RAM. You won't be able to buy "low" capacity memory modules (i.e., less than a gigabyte) in a few years. So a system will need robust memory addressing just to deal with the RAM that will ship with it.

So all the people who went out and bought Athlon 64 systems are really ahead of the game, right? Well, not necessarily. Just like users who bought GeForce3 cards may not benefit from the next generation of games using programmable shaders, people who bought Athlon 64s may find their CPUs will be considered low-end processors by the time games that use 64-bit addressing become commonplace. Still, with Windows 64-bit edition just around the corner, early adopters will be able to experiment, and a few 64-bit games may ship in the next year or two.

Of course, by that time, Intel's recently announced "32e" CPUs, which are really x86-64 compatible, will be on the market, and users will be able to choose which brand they like best. But Intel is playing catch-up in this arena, and it will be interesting to see if AMD users will remain loyal to the Athlon 64. ⊠ **Loyd Case**

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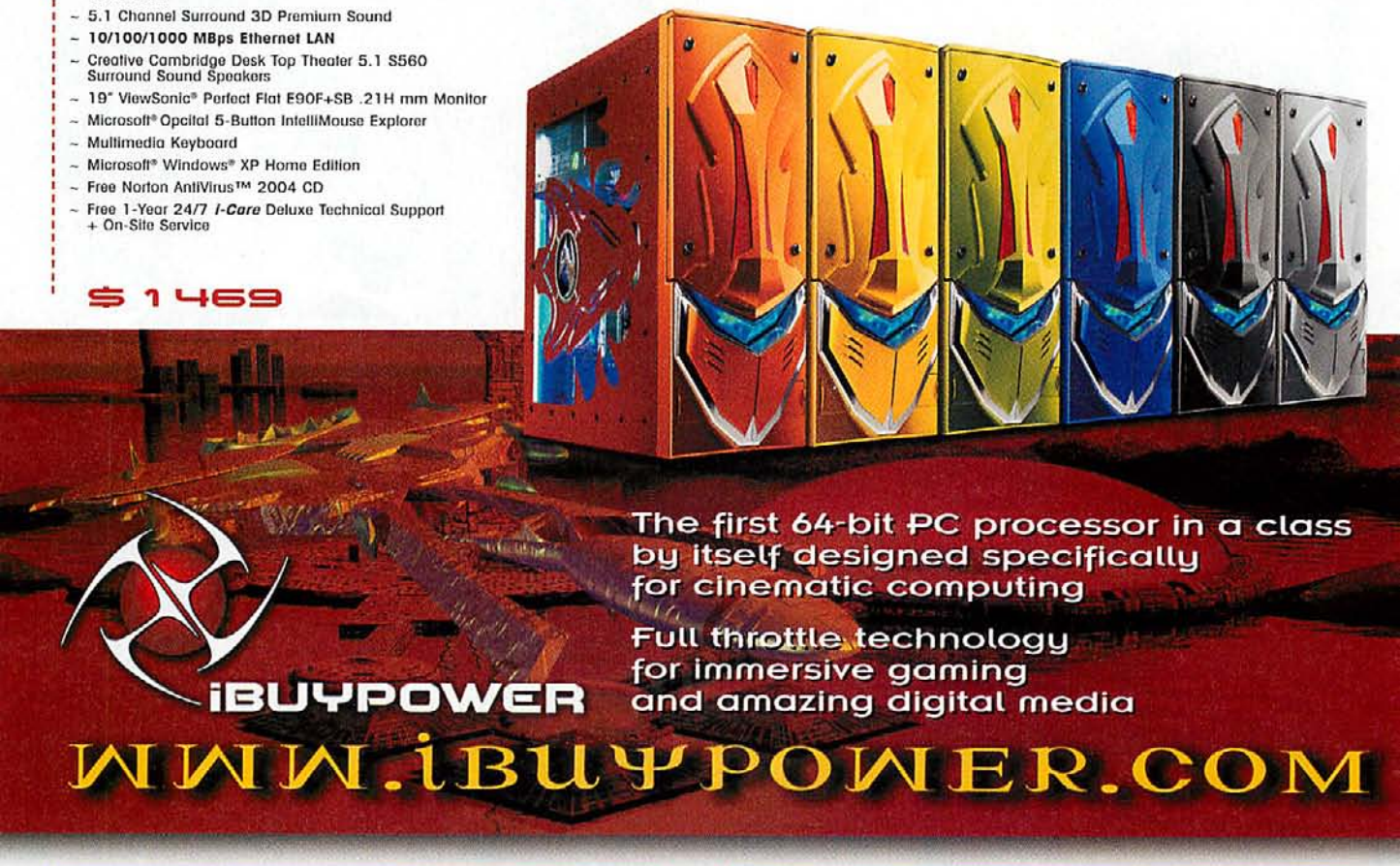
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Check Out











Inside

Most people just keep chugging along on the same obsolete computer until it up and stops being capable of running anything. Check Out is here to fix that. With this handy monthly resource, you'll have all the info you need to upgrade that dusty old has-been of a machine. Plus, we've got a quick recap of what you should be playing on your newly upgraded rig.

A-List

Our picks



Don't you hate it when your computer explodes? For those of you who are unfamiliar with the experience, believe us, it isn't fun—especially when smoke and loud noises are involved. What's even more frustrating is when a computer just inexplicably dies. No explosions, no hardware or software malfunctions...you just wake up one morning and it doesn't power up. We hope that never happens to you, but if it does, you can rest assured that the A-List is your one-stop hardware-recommendation resource when you need a quick fix. Or if you just want to brag to your friends about your über-*UT 2004* framerate. Showoff.



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Intel-based system



PRODUCT	WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT
OUR PICK **710G Gamer** $2,160 Gateway	Gateway has found the sweet spot between being a major OEM and a boutique system maker. Its 710G Gamer uses the same parts as the small guys and is damn near as fast. This machine is so sweet, in fact, that it won this month's desktop roundup. While it isn't necessarily as "fast" as machines by Voodoo and Falcon, its 256MB Nvidia GeForce FX 5950 Ultra graphics card combined with a bevy of awesome accessories have us sold.

AMD-based system



PRODUCT	WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT
OUR PICK **Hexx c:355** $2,500 VoodooPC	**While Gateway's 710G Gamer is like the Swiss Army knife of computers, Voodoo PC's Hexx is an awesome balance of speed and style. AMD's Athlon 64 3000+ CPU, in combination with a 256MB ATI Radeon 9800 XT graphics card and 1GB of Corsair memory, makes this rig plenty fast—but it's the Hexx's unique styling that really has us hooked. Whoever said PCs have to be ugly?**

ILLUSTRATIONS BY KRISTIAN OLSON

LAN-boy rig



PRODUCT	WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT
OUR PICK **FragBox Pro** $1,795 Falcon Northwest	Dave Salvator doesn't like anything, which is why we were surprised he wanted to give Falcon's FragBox Pro an Editors' Choice award. Of course, one look at the thing and you can see why it's so cool. Inside that little box lurks an Intel Pentium 4 2.80GHz CPU, a 120GB hard drive, 1GB of memory, and a 256MB Nvidia GeForceFX 5950 Ultra graphics card. Not all small form-factor PCs can pack that kind of power, but Falcon worked some serious "cooling magic" to get all that to work together.



PERIPHERALS

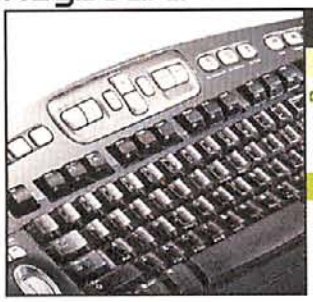
Is it just us, or does playing flight sims and street-racing games on a keyboard feel really, really wrong? Thank goodness for all those fancy joysticks and racing wheels.

Speakers



PRODUCT	WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT
HIGH-END PICK **GigaWorks S750** $500 Creative Labs	While some may scoff at a 7.1 speaker setup, who would turn down 700 watts of awesome audio power? With two rear and two side satellites, the S750s will turn your home sound setup into a movie theater.
MIDRANGE PICK **Z-5300** $200 Logitech	**Having earned an Editors' Choice award in our February issue, Logitech's Z-5300 speakers boast incredible power, quality, and some nice bass, all for a decent, affordable price. Take note, though—they lack a digital input.**
BUDGET PICK **Z-3** $100 Logitech	If you're on a budget, then we suggest you forgo a cheap set of 4.1 or 5.1 speakers and opt for a good set of 2.1 speakers instead. Logitech's Z-3s sound great and look even better.

Keyboard



PRODUCT	WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT
WIRED PICK **MultiMedia Keyboard** $30 Microsoft	You can't go wrong with this handy keyboard. The buttons at the top allow you to perform common functions such as launching a web browser, opening folders, and controlling multimedia apps like Media Player.
WIRELESS PICK **Wireless Optical Desktop Elite** $100 Microsoft	**MS' latest desktop set sports its new Tilt Wheel technology, which allows you to scroll horizontally through documents. In addition to being highly customizable, this keyboard's cushioned palm rest is more comfortable than a standard plastic one.**

Gamepad



PRODUCT	WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT
OUR PICK **Dual Action Gamepad** $20 Logitech	If you're playing sports games on a PC, this is the gamepad to use. Many EA Sports games use this as a default, and it's essentially a PC version of the PS2's excellent DualShock controller.

A-LIST PERIPHERALS

Mouse



PRODUCT	WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT
WIRED PICK **Intellimouse Explorer 4.0** $50 Microsoft	Microsoft's latest Intellimouse Explorer boasts the company's new "tilt wheel" technology, but more important, it's very comfortable and rocks plenty of customizable buttons. It can also be connected to either a standard PS/2 port or a USB port.
WIRELESS PICK **Intellimouse Explorer 2.0** $60 Microsoft	**Microsoft's Wireless Intellimouse Explorer 2.0 is essentially the wireless version of the Intellimouse Explorer 4.0. While it comes in several colors, we prefer the leather-bound version.**

Headset



PRODUCT	WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT
OUR PICK **PC150** $70 Sennheiser	One out of one editors named Darren Gladstone agrees: "You're not exactly going to record a top 50 album with these, but they're good for the job at hand: communicating and talking trash with your buddies online."

Joystick



PRODUCT	WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT
OUR PICK **Extreme 3D Pro** $35 Logitech	**While they aren't as popular as they once were, there are still some pretty good flight sims out there. Whether you're a hardcore or casual flight-sim fan, Logitech's Extreme 3D Pro will help you get the job done.**

Racing wheel



PRODUCT	WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT
OUR PICK **MOMO Racing Wheel** $100 Logitech	The entry-level MOMO wheel is an awesome peripheral. What's not to love about feeling like you're actually behind the wheel? It's just the kind of thing that'll get your motor in gear for some *Need for Speed Underground*.



DISPLAYS

One of these days, we'll all be using some sort of badass triple-screen surround-view monitor that totally immerses us in the gaming experience. Here's what we're stuck with until then.

CRT monitor

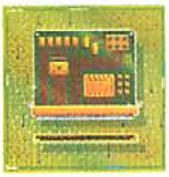


PRODUCT	WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT
HIGH-END PICK **22-inch MultiSync FE2111SB** $600 NEC	When it comes to gaming, CRTs can't be beat—and NEC's MultiSync has been the favorite of many of the boutiques for years. With a huge viewable area and a great price, this is definitely a recommended buy.
BUDGET PICK **19-inch E90fb** $225 ViewSonic	**For gamers on a budget, ViewSonic's 19-inch E90fb is a fantastic CRT display. Although 14-inch monitors used to be entry-level displays, there's no reason to go below 19 inches with prices like this.**

LCD monitor



PRODUCT	WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT
HIGH-END PICK **UltraSharp 2001FP** $1,000 Dell	Dell's UltraSharp 2001FP is often packaged with the company's XPS gaming system. With a slick design and a response time of 16ms, this display makes gaming a real treat. It also pivots 90 degrees for vertical document viewing.
BUDGET PICK **CML175B** $500 Hitachi	**This update to last year's CML174B model boasts a native resolution of 1280x1024 (great for gaming) and a 16ms response time. In other words, a great gaming LCD just got more...uh...greater(er).**



COMPONENTS

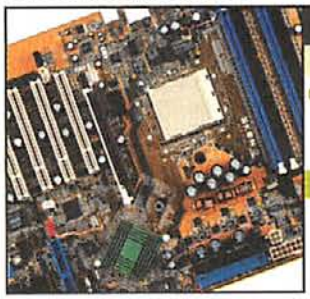
What every gamer needs is one of those seizure-inducing cases with see-through panels, glowing fans, and multiple annoying flashing lights. Actually, scratch that idea.

Processor



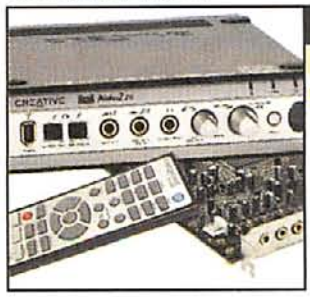
PRODUCT	WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT
HIGH-END PICK **Athlon 64 FX-53** $800 AMD	Among gaming processors, the Athlon 64 FX-53 is at the top of the heap. Even though the 64 bits aren't being exploited, the 32-bit applications run almost as fast as Darren can talk. We said almost.
BUDGET PICK **Pentium 4 2.8GHz** $200 Intel	**While the 2.8GHz Pentium 4 chip is not as king-of-the-road as an 800MHz frontside bus 3.4GHz model, it is still one zippy little core. Plus, with an Intel mobo, you'll be ready for the eventual upgrade.**

Motherboard



PRODUCT	WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT
HIGH-END PICK **SK8V** $200 Asus	Designed for AMD's Athlon 64 FX line of processors, the SK8V sports the 64-bit chipset of choice—the VIA K8T800. This motherboard also boasts a 400MHz frontside bus, as well as support for DDR 400 RAM.
BUDGET PICK **D875PBZ** $150 Intel	**Intel's D875PBZ isn't so much "low end" as it is flexible. Constructed around the i875P chipset, it has built-in SATA RAID support and makes a great backbone for an affordable Pentium 4 system.**

Soundcard



PRODUCT	WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT
OUR PICK **Audigy 2 ZS** $200 Creative Labs	You haven't experienced surround until you've heard an awesome 7.1 system. In conjunction with Creative's GigaWorks S750 7.1 speakers, the Audigy 2 ZS is awesome. Serious audiophiles can upgrade to the Platinum or Platinum Pro models for even more power.

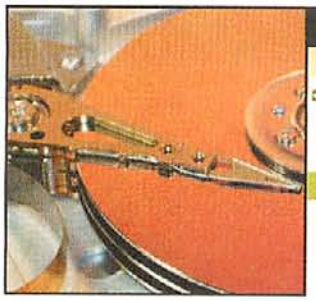
A-LIST COMPONENTS

Videocard



PRODUCT	WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT
HIGH-END PICK **256MB Radeon 9800 XT** $350 ATI	The Radeon XT was originally supposed to come packaged with *Half-Life 2*. Unfortunately, the game's release date slipped, but many of these cards are still being packaged with a coupon for its eventual release.
MIDRANGE PICK **128MB Radeon 9600 XT** $175 ATI	**ATI's midrange part is plenty fast enough to handle any game you're currently playing. Sure, it may not be as fancy as a 256MB 9800 XT card, but it's definitely easier on the wallet.**
BUDGET PICK **128MB GeForce FX 5200 Ultra** $80 Nvidia	Stay behind a generation to save some money on graphics cards. The Nvidia GeForce FX 5200 clocks in at about $80, which is quite a bargain. Just make sure you don't buy the cheaper, non-Ultra version.

Hard drive



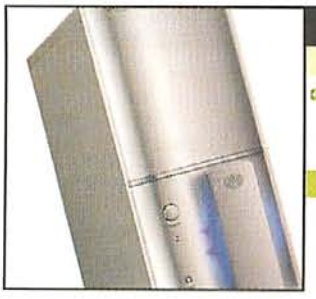
PRODUCT	WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT
HIGH-END PICK **Deskstar 7K250 250GB** $250 Hitachi	A single 250GB Hitachi Deskstar hard drive provides more than enough disk space for 99 percent of the world's population. If you're in that rare 1 percent that needs more, double them up for a monstrous RAID array.
BUDGET PICK **DiamondMax Plus 9 80GB** $100 Maxtor	**At a little more than $1 per GB, Maxtor's 7,200 rpm DiamondMax Plus 9 80GB drive is a great option for a single-drive rig.**

Optical drive



PRODUCT	WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT
HIGH-END PICK **DVR-A07U** $200 Pioneer	This drive is not for the faint of heart—or light of wallet. Pioneer's latest combo drive does everything you need: You can create your own DVD movies, burn music CDs, or just back up your data.
BUDGET PICK **DDU1621 16x DVD-ROM** $30 Sony	**Judging by the responses to our first-ever DVD, many of you have yet to adopt this technology. At around $30 for a basic 16x drive, there's no reason to wait—and Sony's 16x DVD-ROM is a great choice.**

Case



PRODUCT	WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT
TOWER PICK **TAC-T01-E1C** $150 Cooler Master	Cooler Master's TAC-T01 is big, heavy, and not necessarily cheap, but it's a great case for building that rig of your dreams. It's solid and shiny, and there's a metal monolith inset on the case's face. What is that thing for, anyway?
ALTERNATE FORM PICK **SN85G4** $300 Shuttle	**Shuttle's Nforce3 150-based setup is the perfect option for building an Athlon 64 FX-based shuttle box. The motherboard supports DDR 400 and rocks Realtek's 6-channel audio. Plus, it's much more portable than a bulky tower.**



MOBILITY

While the rest of us take our notes on good old-fashioned paper, Darren "Inspector Gadget" Gladstone takes his on a handheld Sony CLIE PEG-UX50. And we thought it was just a fancy Game Boy.

Laptop



PRODUCT	WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT
HIGH-END PICK **M675** $2,600 Gateway	With a 128MB ATI Mobility Radeon 9600 (M10) graphics card and a 17-inch display, Gateway's M675 is doper than most desktop PCs. Plus, it can be difficult to put a desktop PC in your backpack.
BUDGET PICK **M6807** $1,549 (after $100 mail-in rebate) eMachines	**The M6807 ships with a 64MB ATI Mobility Radeon 9600 (M10) graphics chip, but in many tests, it outperforms machines with 128MB graphics options. That said, at only $1,549, you'll be damned happy with this Athlon 64–based laptop.**
LIGHTWEIGHT PICK **Inspiron 300m** $2,000 Dell	The Inspiron 300m is the perfect traveling companion. The docking station's extra battery space means more than five hours of life, and additional speakers give added rockability. Just don't expect to do much gaming on it.

Phone



PRODUCT	WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT
FLIP-PHONE PICK **VI660** $199 ($49 with a two-year contract) Samsung	Of the current crop of gaming-enabled phones, this one is the slickest, most game-friendly of the bunch. With the addition of the $39 PCS Game Pad (a GBA-like docking station), it's much easier to control the action.
NON-FLIP-PHONE PICK **3660** $200 Nokia	**Thanks to the new federal policy that allows you to keep your phone number when switching cell providers, negotiating and pinning down a really good deal on a phone is much easier. For a normal-sized phone, this model works great.**

PDA



PRODUCT	WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT
PALM OS PICK **Zodiac 2** $400 Tapwave	For the moment, you aren't gonna find another PDA with this kind of juice for the price that Tapwave is asking. You can bust out some grinds in *Tony Hawk*, juggle your contact manager (yay!), listen to music, and watch *The Simpsons*.
POCKETPC OS PICK **e805** $500 Toshiba	**This PDA sits atop Toshiba's food chain. It's built especially for the power-hungry PocketPC user, and its bells and whistles far surpass the 400MHz processor and 128MB of free RAM. What better way to run MAME and countless games?**

Gadget



PRODUCT	WHY YOU SHOULD BUY IT
OUR PICK **DSC-T1 Cyber-shot** $550 Sony	Holy crap! Your wallet is probably bigger than this 5-megapixel digital camera. Sony's DSC-T1 is tiny, but it has a large LCD screen and 3x optical zoom. Poor battery life is the only price you'll be paying for high style.

Rewind 100

What should you play today? Names in red indicate Editors' Choice games



GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
Across the Dnepr	4/04	An imbalanced, single-scenario *Korsun Pocket* add-on: Dnot worth the Dmoney	★★★½☆
Age of Mythology: The Titans Expansion	1/04	More bells, more whistles, same game	★★★½☆
Age of Wonders: Shadow Magic	11/03	A great strategy game that's worth purchasing for the random-map generator alone	★★★★½
American Conquest: Fight Back	1/04	Fight boredom and micromanagement by avoiding this lame stand-alone expansion	★★☆☆☆
America's Army: Special Forces v2.0	3/04	*Special Forces* is the tactical-sim genre at its finest	★★★★½
AquaNox 2: Revelation	12/03	Like drowning in a sea of boredom	★☆☆☆☆
Armed & Dangerous	3/04	A straight-laced shooter with great cut-scenes	★★★☆☆
Battle Engine Aquila	4/04	Gorgeous and fun *MechWarrior*-style action, but not deep or groundbreaking.	★★★☆☆
Battlefield 1942: Secret Weapons of World War II	12/03	The last bit of fuel injection for the aging *Battlefield* engine is worth the money	★★★★½
Beyond Good & Evil	3/04	Gorgeous, stylish, and wholly original, this action-adventure is a gem	★★★★½
Black Hawk Down: Team Sabre	4/04	An entertaining add-on that beefs up the single- and multiplayer games. Rat-a-tat-tat!	★★★★☆
The Black Mirror	2/04	*The Black Mirror*'s gothic horror doesn't require much reflection	★★☆☆☆



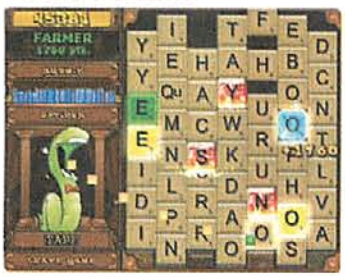
GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
Blade and Sword	4/04	A lame *Diablo* clone that might've been interesting four years ago	★★☆☆☆
Broken Sword 3: The Sleeping Dragon	2/04	*Dragon* flamboyantly breaks out of the box, but drags it around a little too much	★★★★☆

GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
Call of Duty	1/04	*Call of Duty* is so good and so much fun that you'll undoubtedly wish it was longer	★★★★½
Celebrity Deathmatch	2/04	Save your money by just throwing beer cans at the television	★☆☆☆☆
Chariots of War	11/03	As dry and inviting as the Arabian Desert	★★☆☆☆
Chaser	1/04	A good-looking shooter that's only fun for the first few hours	★★☆☆☆
Chrome	2/04	A stunning sci-fi-themed shooter that makes *Halo* look hollow	★★★★☆



GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
Civilization III: Conquests	4/04	An incredibly refined new version of *Civ III*, with multiplayer that finally works	★★★★½
Cold Zero: No Mercy	12/03	*Cold Zero*'s repetitive, depthless play leaves you cold	★★☆☆☆
Combat Command 2: Danger Forward	11/03	A great scenario editor can't lift this average grand-tactical war game above *Korsun Pocket*	★★★☆☆
Combat Mission: Afrika Korps	4/04	*Combat Mission 2.1*	★★★☆☆
Commandos 3	5/04	Maybe the toughest game ever, and not in a good way	★★☆☆☆
Conspiracies	5/04	Cheesier than the ripest Greek feta	★☆☆☆☆
Contract J.A.C.K.	2/04	No franchise shines forever—*J.A.C.K.* is the first blemish on the *NOLF* series	★★☆☆☆
Counter-Strike: Condition Zero	3/04	This game was great when it was free. For $40, it's just good	★★★½☆
Dark Age of Camelot: Trials of Atlantis	2/04	Good expansion for veteran players, but not much for new players	★★★½☆
Dark Fall: The Journal	11/03	The only thing missing from this eerie game's box is a change of underwear	★★★★☆

Free Stuff That Rules



Bookworm

★★★★★

It's a good thing games aren't considered drugs, or PopCap Games would probably be on death row right now. *Bookworm* is an insidiously addictive, productivity-wrecking word game.



Zuma

N/A

Those of you who read the April issue's Scorched Earth column have an idea of how much this little color-matching game sucks you in. Simple, yet mind-boggligly addictive—it's the *Tetris* of the 21st century.

GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
Dead to Rights	2/04	This no-frills port of an aged, derivative, repetitive shooter was dead on arrival	★★☆☆☆
Desert Storm III	2/04	At times engaging, but not quite all it can be	★★½☆☆
Deus Ex 2: Invisible War	3/04	The sequel to *Deus Ex* is both dumbed down and smarted up	★★★☆☆
Dominions II	2/04	The most gameplay of any 4X game available anywhere	★★★★½
Dungeon Siege: Legends of Aranna	2/04	Good stuff for fans of the original	★★★½☆
Empires: Dawn of the Modern Age	2/04	A solid entry into the burgeoning historical real-time-strategy subgenre	★★★★☆
Etherlords II	12/03	A better, cheaper, 3D version of *Magic: The Gathering*	★★★½☆
F/A-18 Operation Iraqi Freedom	11/03	Nothing really new here, but worth a look if you need a new sim for a slow system	★★½☆☆
FIFA 2004	2/04	It might be a rough console port, but it's still the best soccer game on any platform	★★★½☆
Final Fantasy XI	2/04	A rock-solid MMORPG from one of the most unlikely sources	★★★★☆
Freedom Fighters	1/04	Great teamplay tactics, but the PC version drew the short stick	★★★★☆
Ghost Master	11/03	This game is clever, stylish, and fun to watch, but it's a little too hard to control	★★★½☆
Gothic II	2/04	Better than the first, but still a little too wonky and foreign to be a classic	★★★★☆
Halo	11/03	Lost in translation	★★★½☆
Heaven & Hell	11/03	Witless, repetitive, and utterly devoid of interesting strategy elements	★☆☆☆☆
Hidden & Dangerous 2	2/04	A really good game hampered by the same pesky bugs and problematic A.I. as the original	★★★½☆
Highway to the Reich	1/04	An excellent system gets better	★★★★☆
Homeworld 2	12/03	It's no *Cataclysm*—it's not even *Homeworld*	★★½☆☆



Horizons: Empire of Istaria	5/04	More of the same, with dragons	★★☆☆☆
Hoyle's Majestic Chess	12/03	A valiant attempt at chess for dummies that doesn't quite teach dummies—but does provide some decent chess	★★★½☆

GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE



Jack the Ripper	5/04	A good Ripper story butchered by bugs, feeble puzzles, and a bad ending	★★☆☆☆
Jetfighter V	2/04	A rare combination of frustration and boredom	★★☆☆☆



Korea: Forgotten Conflict	4/04	A nice attempt at a *Commandos* clone in a fresh setting, with horrible A.I.	★★☆☆☆
Knights of the Old Republic	2/04	A total masterpiece from BioWare. Easily the best RPG of the year and possibly the best *Star Wars* game ever made	★★★★★
Lionheart: Legacy of the Crusader	11/03	Unbalanced, tedious, buggy, and lacking in imagination—and those are its good points	★½☆☆☆
Lock-On: Modern Air Combat	03/04	A tasty treat for starving jet-sim fans, even without the dynamic campaign	★★★½☆
Lords of EverQuest	03/04	A fairly decent attempt at capitalizing on a tried-and-true (*WarCraft III*) formula	★★★☆☆
LOTR: The Return of the King	2/04	Check your brain at the door for this sword-swinging, spell-slinging good time	★★★★☆
Madden NFL 2004	11/03	Easily the best *Madden* game yet, but be prepared to buy a Logitech Dual Action controller	★★★★½
Magic: The Gathering—Battlegrounds	4/04	A painful fighting game in which you don't fight and don't use cards. Run away	★★☆☆☆
Massive Assault	1/04	Lemmings gone turn-based	★★½☆☆
Max Payne 2	1/04	Improves upon nearly every facet but doesn't mess with the formula	★★★★½

DVDs
Good TV, now on DVD



Smallville: The Complete Second Season

Before Clark Kent became a "superman," he was just a boy growing up in Kansas. The *Smallville* series reexamines familiar characters like Lex Luthor to create a compelling new backstory. This second season totally rules, making up for everything the mediocre first season lacked.



Chapelle's Show: Season One Uncensored

Dave Chapelle is a funny man. His loud sketch comedy dances a crazy jig across a line that no one else would dare cross—except Chapelle, who crosses plenty of lines himself. A black white-supremacist? Only on *Chapelle's Show*.



Samurai Jack: Season 1

Jack is a time-displaced samurai who must find a way to stop the powerful evil spirit Aku. The bright, stylistic animation is unlike most other cartoons, and the quirky story line is rife with samurai action.



Crimsonland

N/A

Yeah, so there are a ton of games in which you have to pick up a bunch of guns and shoot aliens. But this one is different—it's got an overhead perspective and lots of variety, and it gets incredibly challenging.



Duke Nukum

N/A

Now THIS is the definition of old school. Back before *Duke 3D* and the laughingstock that is *Duke Nukem Forever* (coming to stores in 2736!), Duke was kicking ass 2D-style in this shareware gem from Apogee.

Anime

Cartoons aren't just for kids



Neon Genesis Evangelion: Director's Cut

Evangelion will soon be made into a feature-length film by the special-effects team behind the blockbuster *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Until then, the newly released director's cut offers revised details on the classic series.



Inuyasha

Trapped in an ancient era, Kagome must join (and put up with) Inuyasha, a half-demon on a quest to undo evil. From the creator of *Ranma*, this series is a mix of action, comedy, and romance.



Samurai X

Why would the most vicious assassin in all of feudal Japan turn away from his former ways? Filled with blood, violence, and great drama, the *Samurai X* miniseries is the prequel to the fan-favorite *Rurouni Kenshin* anime series.

GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
Medal of Honor: Allied Assault—Breakthrough	12/03	Intense and usually satisfying, but barely good enough to justify the price	★★★☆☆
Midnight Nowhere	2/04	Horrible horror with a zero for a hero	★☆☆☆☆
Mistmare	12/03	Just throw your $20 into the street instead	☆☆☆☆☆
Mysterious Journey II	3/04	For puzzle players who like pretty pictures, too	★★½☆☆
NASCAR Thunder 2004	3/04	Not bad, but we expected more	★★★½☆
NBA Live 2004	3/04	One of the best 5-on-5 games for any platform	★★★★½
Need for Speed Underground	3/04	Racing doesn't get much better—unless you're in a real car	★★★★½
Neighbors From Hell	1/04	A fun way to spend a single afternoon	★★★½☆
Neverwinter Nights: Hordes of the Underdark	3/04	A five-star expansion sadly undone by bugs	★★★½☆
Nexagon: Deathmatch	11/03	Rock-paper-scissors is a more challenging strategy game	★★★★☆
NHL 2K4	1/04	The best NHL experience on virtual ice	★★★★★
No Man's Land	1/04	Another follow-the-numbers RTS	★★½☆☆
Nosferatu	2/04	Well, at least it sounds spooky	★½☆☆☆
Once Upon a Knight	2/04	A decent-enough RTS bogged down by a lame RPG and the mistaken belief that milk is funny	★★½☆☆



GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
One Must Fall: Battlegrounds	4/04	If you're into third-person fighting games with robots, knock yourself out	★★☆☆☆
Patrician III	2/04	Little more than a glorified *Patrician II* patch	★★½☆☆
Pax Romana	3/04	A decent primer for *Rome: Total War*	★★★☆☆
Pirates of the Caribbean	11/03	Two half-good games don't equal one good one	★★☆☆☆
PlanetSide: Core Combat	2/04	A decent idea at its core, but not worth the price	★★½☆☆
Railroad Tycoon 3	2/04	You don't have to love trains to enjoy the historical and economic challenges here—but a little train love won't hurt	★★★★½

GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
Rebels Prison Escape	1/04	Go get a copy of *Commandos 2* instead	★½☆☆☆
Republic: The Revolution	12/03	Good idea, bad game	★★½☆☆
Runaway: A Road Adventure	12/03	The bimbo of graphic-adventure games: both pretty and stupid	★★☆☆☆
Savage	1/04	A potential blockbuster marginalized by its own delivery	★★★½☆
Secret Weapons	3/04	If the combat didn't stink, it might have been cheesy, over-the-top fun	★★½☆☆



GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
Shadowbane: Rise of Chaos	4/04	A skimpy add-on that's barely enough to satisfy true *Shadowbane* junkies	★★½☆☆
Silent Hill 3	3/04	In *SH3*, the only things that go bump in the night are klutzy monsters	★½☆☆☆
Silent Storm	4/04	Like a gorgeous WWII mod to the revered *X-Com*. Highly recommended	★★★★½
SimCity 4: Rush Hour	1/04	The new focus on transportation adds substantially to an already excellent game experience	★★★★☆
Space Colony	1/04	A clever combination of real-time strategy and *The Sims* isn't clever enough to hold your interest for long	★★½☆☆
Squad Assault: Western Front	3/04	Better than *GI Combat*, like anchovies are better than lutefisk	★★☆☆☆



GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
Star Chamber	5/04	Original, fun, competitive, and free to try. What're you waiting for?	★★★★½
Star Fury	2/04	Open-ended and flexible without being too complex	★★★★☆

Subscription-Based Crap



Shadowbane: Rise of Chaos

★★½☆☆

For a game with such a loyal prerelease fanbase, *Shadowbane* sure did crash and burn. Simply focusing on PVP does not make an MMO good, even if it is a valiant first step.



Horizons: Empire of Istaria

★★☆☆☆

While we're on the subject of what does and doesn't make an MMO good, here's another good tip to follow: Dragons are cool, but they need a good game to go along with them.

GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
Starsky & Hutch	1/04	The bad rep of the '70s continues with this crappy game from a crappy license	★★☆☆☆



GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
Syberia II	5/04	Visually stunning, but the pedestrian gameplay saps some of the fun	★★★½☆
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles	5/04	It's not as bad as you'd imagine—it's worse	★★☆☆☆
Temple	1/04	Yet another good game marred by bugs. Wheeee!	★★½☆☆
Terminator 3: War of the Machines	4/04	Ugly and just plain terrible	★½☆☆☆
The Great Escape	11/03	Not quite as bad as a month in the cooler, but not much better, either	★★☆☆☆
The Hobbit	2/04	Standard console fare, lightly Tolkien-flavored	★★☆☆☆
The Simpsons: Hit & Run	2/04	The best *GTA3* rip-off ever, and a must-have for *Simpsons* fans	★★★★½
The Sims: Makin' Magic	1/04	The final *Sims* expansion plays like a charm	★★★★☆
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	12/03	A game that will please both hardcore golf-sim addicts and casual gamers	★★★★½
Titans of Steel	1/04	An old-school game with little crossover potential	★★½☆☆



GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
Title Bout Championship Boxing	5/04	The undisputed heavyweight champion of boxing sims	★★★★☆
Tomb Raider: The Angel of Darkness	10/03	Not as bad as the movie—oh wait, yes it is	★½☆☆☆

GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	12/03	As long as you have a gamepad, it's the most fun you can have on a skateboard without putting yourself in the hospital	★★★★☆
UFO: Aftermath	1/04	*UFO: Aftermath* is a good game that should have waited three weeks and one big patch longer to be released	★★★☆☆
Uru	2/04	Some good puzzles, some bad action, no story, lots of familiar elements—maybe the eventual online content can make it more compelling	★★★☆☆
Vegas Tycoon	4/04	A colorful and entertaining casino builder that fell shy of the jackpot	★★★½☆
Victoria	3/04	Good game, bad bugs	★★★☆☆
War of the Ring	2/04	Good use of Middle-earth elements in a sadly mundane RTS	★★★☆☆
Warlords IV	1/04	A strangely joyless version of a classic strategy franchise	★★☆☆☆
Warrior Kings: Battles	12/03	Good game, but it's a warm glass of milk when what you really want is a shot of your favorite poison	★★★½☆



GAME	ISSUE	VERDICT	SCORE
Wars & Warriors: Joan of Arc	5/04	Though it has its moments, *Joan* lacks a certain *je ne sais quoi*	★★½☆☆
Will Rock	11/03	To quote a Twisted Sister classic: "We're not gonna take it!"	★★½☆☆
World War II: Frontline Command	10/03	Bad interface, boring missions, and no realism, but the documentary footage is OK!	★★☆☆☆
Worms 3D	5/04	Short doses of personality don't overcome the long frustration	★★★☆☆
X-2: The Threat	3/04	A much-deeper yet less-playable version of *Freelancer*	★★★½☆
XIII	2/04	This Belgian import waffles between fun and frustration, excitement and tedium	★★★☆☆
You Don't Know Jack: The Lost Gold	5/04	Some treasures are best left buried	★★☆☆☆
X-Plane 7.40	4/04	Lets would-be aircraft designers create a wild variety of flyable vehicles	★★★☆☆
Zero Hour	1/04	*C&C* better than it's ever been	★★★★☆

Toys
Let's play make-believe!



20th Anniversary Optimus Prime
The new, limited-edition, 20th anniversary Optimus Prime blows any other Transformer (or toy, for that matter) out of the water. Almost a foot tall with die-cast metal parts, this grand Optimus will run you about $80, but take it from *CGW*'s resident toy fanatic, Johnny Liu—it's well worth the price.



XEVOZ
The maker of Stikfas delivers these infinitely poseable figures with stylistic designs. You can even swap parts between different figures to create your own fiery death bot.

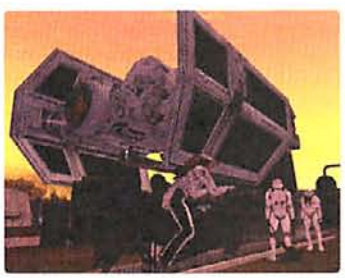


Gashapon
Hugely popular in Japan, these small, detailed collectibles are distributed via vending machines. Gashapon toys have recently begun to show up Stateside, and though we've gotten some cool stuff (like a Marvel superheroes set), the best figures are still abroad.



World War II Online
★★☆☆☆

The thought of a massively multiplayer World War II experience sounds cool. Too bad this one is virtually unplayable. Kids, do yourselves a favor and stick with *Battlefield*.



The Sims Online
★★½☆☆

Not everything with the word "*Sims*" on it is gold. We predicted good things for the online version of the best-selling game of all time, but reality proved to be a lot more boring. Designer tip: Next time, put a game in the box.

Tom vs. Bruce

Two gamers enter, one gamer wins



In the invasion game, Bruce is killed early by little bugs.

DEVELOPER: **Epic Games/Digital Extremes** GENRE: **Multiplayer FPS** ESRB RATING: **T** REQUIRED: **Pentium III, 128MB RAM, 3.5GB install** RECOMMENDED: **1.5GHz processor, 256MB RAM** MULTIPLAYER: **LAN, Internet (2-32 players)**

Unreal Tournament 2004

Bruce shoots Tom, Tom shoots Bruce

We thought it would be nice to play an action game, partly because it would be a change of pace from the strategy and RTS games we normally do and partly because some great action games have just come out. Tom suggested *Unreal Tournament 2004*. Bruce, a man of thought over action, was worried he wouldn't put up much of a fight.

To test this theory, we first played a 1-on-1 deathmatch on DM-Morpheus3, a map that involves leaping around the tops of skyscrapers. The results weren't pretty. We're talking "Final score: 20 to -3" not pretty. (Bruce blamed his poor showing on being able to fall to his death if he wasn't looking where he was going.) So, we limit ourselves to team games, each of us backed by a cadre of bots at the adept A.I. setting. Our plan is to play matches in various modes. The victor will be the first person to win four out of seven matches.

Invasion on DM-1on1-Serpentine

Tom: Invasion is a co-op mode in which players have to fight waves of increasingly powerful A.I.-controlled monsters. Since each player racks up a score based on how many monsters he kills, we can play it competitively. Or so I thought. I let Bruce do the killing while I run through the level to collect the rocket launcher, flak cannon, shield, and health keg. About a minute into the game, a message flashes that Bruce has been killed. Quickly tapping the F1 key, I see that I have 6 points to his 1 point. Since the game ends when neither player survives a wave, I figure this is as good a time as any to call it a win. I eat a couple of my own rockets—it takes several since I'd just grabbed the health keg—to claim my first victory. Or so I thought. It turns out you lose 10 points when you kill yourself.

Bruce: This mode is called "invasion." Tom explains that this means there will be invaders and that we will have to kill them. This almost sounds like one of those touchy-feely cooperative games with the railroads and city hall that Tom likes so much because everybody wins. This turns out not to be one of those games, because I lose before I even know what's going on. Tom dies, too, but since he dies after me, I suppose that doesn't matter—although I think the invaders are the real winners here. Along with me, that is, since for some reason probably addressed in the EU Constitution, the game says that I win.

RESULT

Bruce wins 1 to -4

OVERALL SCORE



0



1

Team deathmatch on DM-Gestalt

Bruce: I like this mode because it doesn't have any complicated objectives. Plus, I get to team up with robots, which I assume never miss because they are robots. My strategy for this match is to hide and hope Tom shoots himself again while my robots take out his robots. Somewhere along the way I manage to get a double kill, which is my best move yet and something I'm very proud of, but then I notice I have only one hit point left. I start running around looking for those pills that look like they came from the New Order *Fine Time* cover, only to find out that they're adrenaline and not health. I guess that's at least kind of in keeping with the whole New Order theme. Eventually, someone kills me, which doesn't surprise me. Fortunately, my robots got my back, homes. Fo'shizzle, etc.

Tom: Gestalt is a cool map, kind of a combination of *Tron* with a more depressed palette, the lobby from *The Matrix*, and the office building from *Disclosure* (you probably just remember Demi Moore's undergarments, so you'll have to trust me that it has a cool office building). There are lots of walkways where you can look down and wait for an opportunity to jump your opponents. The bots do this a lot. In fact, the bots are doing lots of things a lot. In the mayhem, I manage to get five kills, two of



Tom
Last month:
It was close, but Queen Tom ultimately conquered all in *Civ III: Conquests*.



Bruce
Last month:
Bruce lost to a guy calling himself Queen Tom, so this month, he's playing as a girl.

them against Bruce while he's running away. It's neck and neck for a while, but Bruce's bots win by one point.

RESULT

Bruce wins 20 to 19

OVERALL SCORE

TOM 0 BRUCE 2

Onslaught on ONS-Severance

Tom: I was convinced that the key to Severance was controlling the middle node where the Leviathan spawns, so I grab this as soon as I can. But several times, I advance the Leviathan toward the last node to connect to Bruce's power core, only to lose a node behind me because the Leviathan is so slow. So I hop out, run back to secure the besieged node, and return to the Leviathan only to discover someone has jacked it. You'd think by now the Liandri Corporation would have invented some way to lock your car when you park it.

Bruce: My initial joy at seeing that I can drive vehicles on a map named after a Dead Can Dance song is tempered by the fact that Tiger tanks aren't available. I plan to blame this upcoming loss on ahistorical vehicle modeling. I head for the biggest panzer I can find (the Goliath) and drive around while my robots actually play the game. They're building some pods or bases or links or something. Good for them! I actually kill some things by tricking Tom's robots into running into me, and then I find this huge tank called the Leviathan. If there is one thing I know, it's heavy tanks.



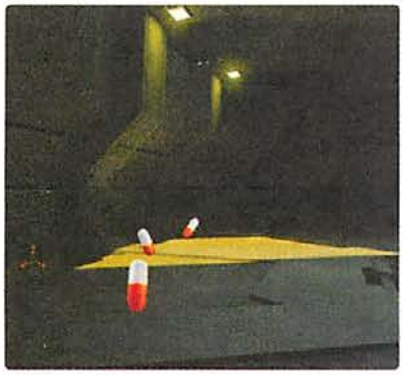
When Manta hits Goliath, Goliath wins.



Tom steps out of his Leviathan for a second.



Bruce just sticks to the robot and hopes for the best. Remember that New Order single?



Tom: This one goes back and forth, with a full complement of six bots on each team running around the map. It's like being online, where you have to queue up if you want to fly the Raptor. To our bots' credit, it looks like it could go either way most of the time. I waste a lot of the match futzing with the stupid Leviathan. Bruce's bots, on the other hand, have done a great job of figuring out how to use the target painter to break up a node's defense. So when time runs out and we go into core drain, my node has taken about 15 points more damage than Bruce's has. A few minutes later he's got his third win.

RESULT

Bruce wins

OVERALL SCORE

TOM 0 BRUCE 3

Bombing run on BR-Serenity

Tom: We've decided to turn down the bot A.I. since this column is supposed to be Tom vs. Bruce and not Bot vs. Bot. Plus, if I lose another match, Bruce is the winner, which is going to be really hard for me to explain. So we take the bots down two notches, from adept to experienced, at which point I feel like I'm making more of a difference. Serenity is pretty linear for a bombing-run map, consisting of a long winding canyon with goals at either end. My first priority is to grab the shield in the center and then drive back the first wave of attackers while one of my bots plows forward with the ball. Carrying the ball heals you, but it prevents you from attacking. So when you're attacked by just one or two enemies, an important tactic is to pass the ball to the other team—basically, you shoot one of them with it—and then kill the receiver while he's helpless. If the other guys pile on you and you know you're not going to survive, just chuck the ball as far as you can toward their goal to buy yourself some time.

Bruce: It takes me halfway through the match to figure out how the radar at the top of the screen works. It's pretty complicated, giving Tom an advantage due to his mastery of hardcore flight sims. I'm trying to figure out how to cycle through the FLIR modes when Tom jumps through a big hoop.



The weird rings around Tom clearly indicate his use of a cheat mode.



Tom scores a goal in front of thousands of adoring Juventus fans.

which he then tells me is the goal. No matter how many times I shoot Tom, he doesn't die, which I put down to either me not knowing how to use the gun or Tom cheating.

RESULT

Tom wins 17 to 0

OVERALL SCORE

TOM 1 BRUCE 3

Assault on AS-Junkyard

Tom: The attackers have to drive a truck to the exit and the defenders have to stop them. Simple, right? The problem with this map—which I'll call the *Tango & Cash* map in my continuing effort to reference obscure movies—is that the bots aren't very good at driving the truck. Also, while I know little secrets like where the grenade launcher and AVRiL are, Bruce probably won't even be able to figure out how to get around with the jump pads. Still, we start as the defenders, and Bruce's team manages to get the truck out with about 20 seconds to spare. So when things turn44 around, I make a point to always be in the driver's seat. There's a minor setback when the magnetic crane leaves without me, and again when the turret to the second checkpoint blows the truck up just as I'm about to reach it. But ultimately, driving like a bat out of hell serves me well here.

Bruce: This is some crazy stuff here; I don't even know where to start. First, there's a power core, and then you have to get in a truck, drive to the checkpoint, and secure it, and then there's a bridge, and I'm already lost. Fortunately for me, there is an arrow that shows me which direction to go. Fortunately for Tom, he can just stand there and shoot at me while I'm blindly following the arrow. At one point, I follow one of these arrows into a blank wall, even though the arrow's supposed to be pointing the way to the bridge I'm supposed to lower. Eventually, I wise up and figure out that while I have no idea where to go, my robots do, so I should probably let them do the driving while I run around and shoot things. What I don't realize, though, is that Tom will get a chance to be the attacker next, and while it takes my robots just about the whole time to escape from this nuthouse, it takes Tom like five seconds. And that means he wins.



Tom's robot kept doggedly firing at the wall, while Bruce's robot doggedly ignored him.



Still firing, wall just fine.

RESULT

Tom wins

OVERALL SCORE

TOM 2 BRUCE 3

Capture the flag on CTF-Grassyknoll

Tom: I'm sure there's a joke here about a book depository, but I can't quite puzzle it out, so never mind. I order one of my bots to defend, and I tell the other two to cover me. Then I leave a translocator at the entrance of my base so I can quickly teleport back if my flag is grabbed. Which it never is. Between grabs, I swing wide to grab the shield before running into Bruce's base. Bam, bam, bam: three quick flag grabs, nary a death, and a rampage award to show for it.

Bruce: I haven't played capture the flag since grade school, which I assume will be a big handicap here. The first thing I see when I walk out of the building I'm in is that Tom has cheated right from the beginning and parked his air force right over my base. I try to take one of his planes out before I notice that they're birds and probably not part of the scenario. That ends up coming in handy, though, because I notice that while I'm firing my gun, nothing is coming out of it. The reason for this is probably related to a lack of bullets and my failure to pick them up from the bullet store or wherever I'm supposed to get them. Either that or the gun is broken. Every now and then the screen flashes that Tom has the flag. Then I get the flag, but not for long. Eventually, I burn the flag, so my victory is deemed unconstitutional, and Tom wins on a judicial technicality.



Bruce takes his best shot—and misses.

RESULT

Tom wins 3 to 0

OVERALL SCORE

TOM 3 BRUCE 3

Double domination on DOM-Renascent



Big blue.

Bruce: I spend about five minutes scrolling around the map beforehand just to figure out what is going on. Unfortunately, I never really do. There are two points you have to control, but they're up on a higher level, and the only way to get there is to jump on this launch pad and hope it somehow gets you to the top so you can fight. Tom, of course, has mastered this, but I spend most of the match running around on the lower level shooting up into the air. Tom wins the game because for the entire time that he controls the victory points, I'm repeatedly jumping into this wall thing instead of landing on the upper level. I'm not saying I wouldn't have lost anyway, but that is honest to God what actually happened.

Tom: OK, so maybe we turned the bots down too low, because with the exception of a few "Averteds!" there's really no contest here. Three quick scores for my team, the game is over, and I've avoided the unpleasant experience of being beaten at an action game by Bruce Geryk because we had the bots turned up too high. ⊠

RESULT

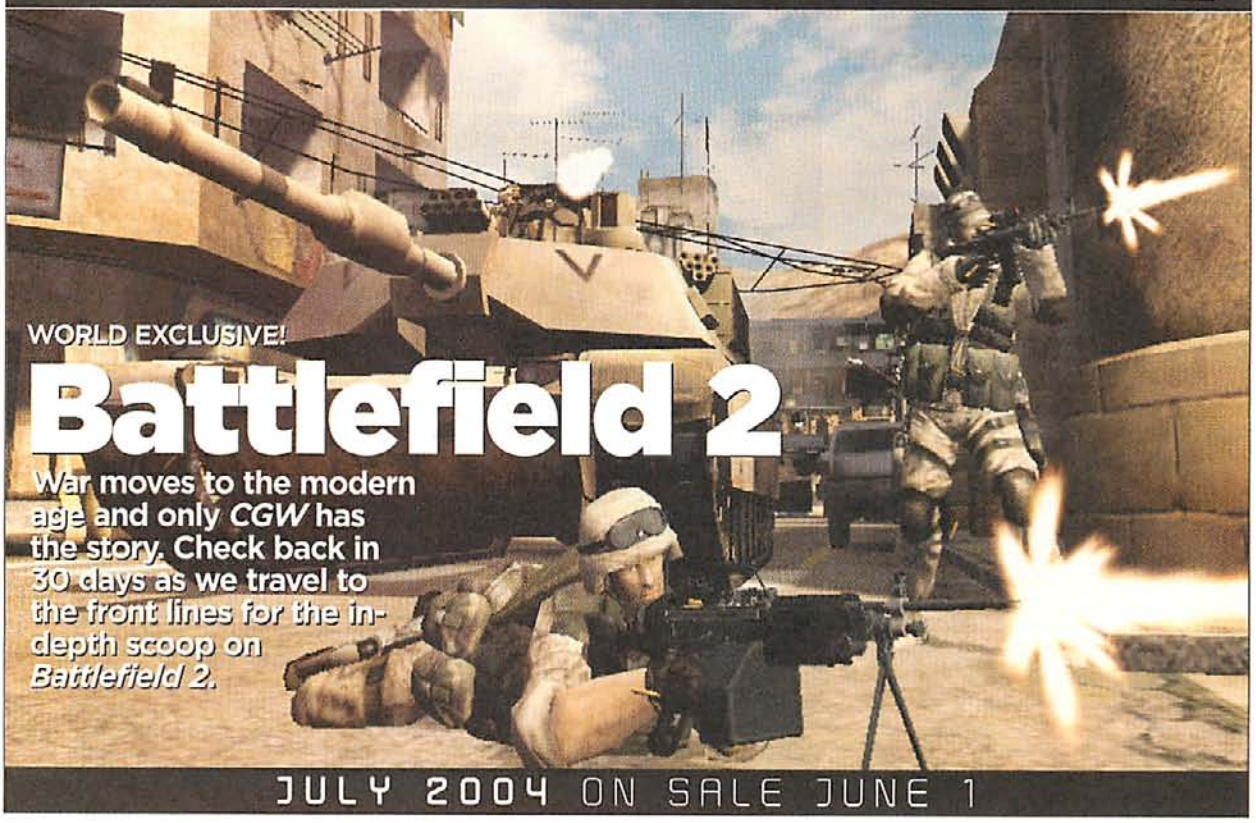
Tom wins 3 to 0

OVERALL SCORE

TOM 4 BRUCE 3

Coming Next Month...

COMPUTER GAMING WORLD



WORLD EXCLUSIVE!

Battlefield 2

War moves to the modern age and only *CGW* has the story. Check back in 30 days as we travel to the front lines for the in-depth scoop on *Battlefield 2*.

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Easy Money

Anyone got a license to kill?

In an irrefutable sign of the apocalypse, *Scooby-Doo 2* is on the brink of a nationwide terror spree, er, theatrical release as I type this. Odds are that as you're reading this, it's raining frogs and the gutters of your home run red with the crimson juices of splattered amphibians (unless tattered clumps of froggy skin are clogging them up, in which case I recommend a length of garden hose and hearty lung power for some good old-fashioned siphoning). What does this all mean? For starters, you can expect to see me galloping around on my pale horse just about any day now. Also, the creative forces in our world have all been expended and have resorted to the worst sort of self-cannibalism imaginable. Should the world last just long enough, I fully expect to see a 3D Sensurround release of *Nanny and the Professor* any day now.

And games? Games are no less immune to the rehashed-license syndrome reducing our once-proud theaters to Nick at Night with a $10 cover charge. *Enter the Matrix*, *Law & Order*, *CSI*, *Celebrity Deathmatch*, *The Seven Samurai*—for the love of God, there's even been a game based on Skittles. Not just based on candy, but on candy utterly bereft of the gameplay promise that even a Three Musketeers bar would imply.

Well, I for one am utterly sick of being kept off the licensed-property money train. I've got just as viciously hobbled a mind as the half-wit responsible for the *American Idol* game. Punch my ticket, conductor—these morally bankrupt game ideas should secure me a seat for a relaxing ride on those golden rails!

Deliverance

A veritable treasure trove of varied gameplay, this property's got it all: bow hunting, white-water rafting, fighting, and a *PaRappa the Rapper*-style banjo duel. An innovative audio-feedback system in tandem with a specialized bundled headset grades your sincerity and accuracy as you "squeal like a pig," determining how long the game's signature minigame is prolonged. You don't need a purty mouth to enjoy it—but it helps!

The Beverly Hillbillies Meet Black Emmanuelle

This cross-promotional gem isn't so much a game as it is The Most Perfect Thing Ever. Frankly, I don't need a whole game of this—just some rough charcoal sketches by even a marginally talented artist would come close to scratching this incessant burning itch on my brain. Either someone satisfies these perfectly understandable longings or I'll have to resort to DIY trepanning. Again. Really, is this so much to ask?



This cross-promotional gem isn't so much a game as it is The Most Perfect Thing Ever.

The Passion of the Christ

Um, bad call.

2,000 Maniacs

The blood-soaked world of drive-in impresario Herschell Gordon Lewis might seem an odd (and somewhat redundant) subject for a game, but this one's got a hook: It's edutainment! A math game for kiddies that plays off the "2,000" in the title to make numbers fun. If hunky Todd loses a pint of blood every 30 seconds after an unanesthetized operation by a passel of bloodthirsty freaks, how many minutes of watching maniacs consume his still-living kidneys in front of his horrified face must he endure before mercifully transpiring and having his corpse desecrated in the most horrible ways imaginable? Hot jets of blood make learning fun!

The Three Musketeers

Are you like me? Probably not, and you're probably thanking whatever you call God for that right about...now. Fair enough. But are you like me in that you've always wondered why the Three Musketeers fought with swords and not actual muskets? It makes no sense: Would you create a candy bar called Benjy the Axe-Murdering Pinhead and put a normal-headed girl named Mavis who kills with a whip made out of razor wire on the wrapper? This action game finally addresses that wrong, and even better, it's child friendly, dodging the dour prudery of the ESRB by having all the excessively musketed victims bleed creamy nougat! Oh, irony, thou art delicious—and so milk chocolatey!

In a world utterly bankrupt of originality, these ideas are positively foolproof. And I've got more—you wouldn't believe how gut-bustingly hilarious the *Requiem for a Dream* multiplayer game is. Yet one question remains: When do I get my money? **Robert Coffey**

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ILLUSTRATION BY JON WAYSHAK

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